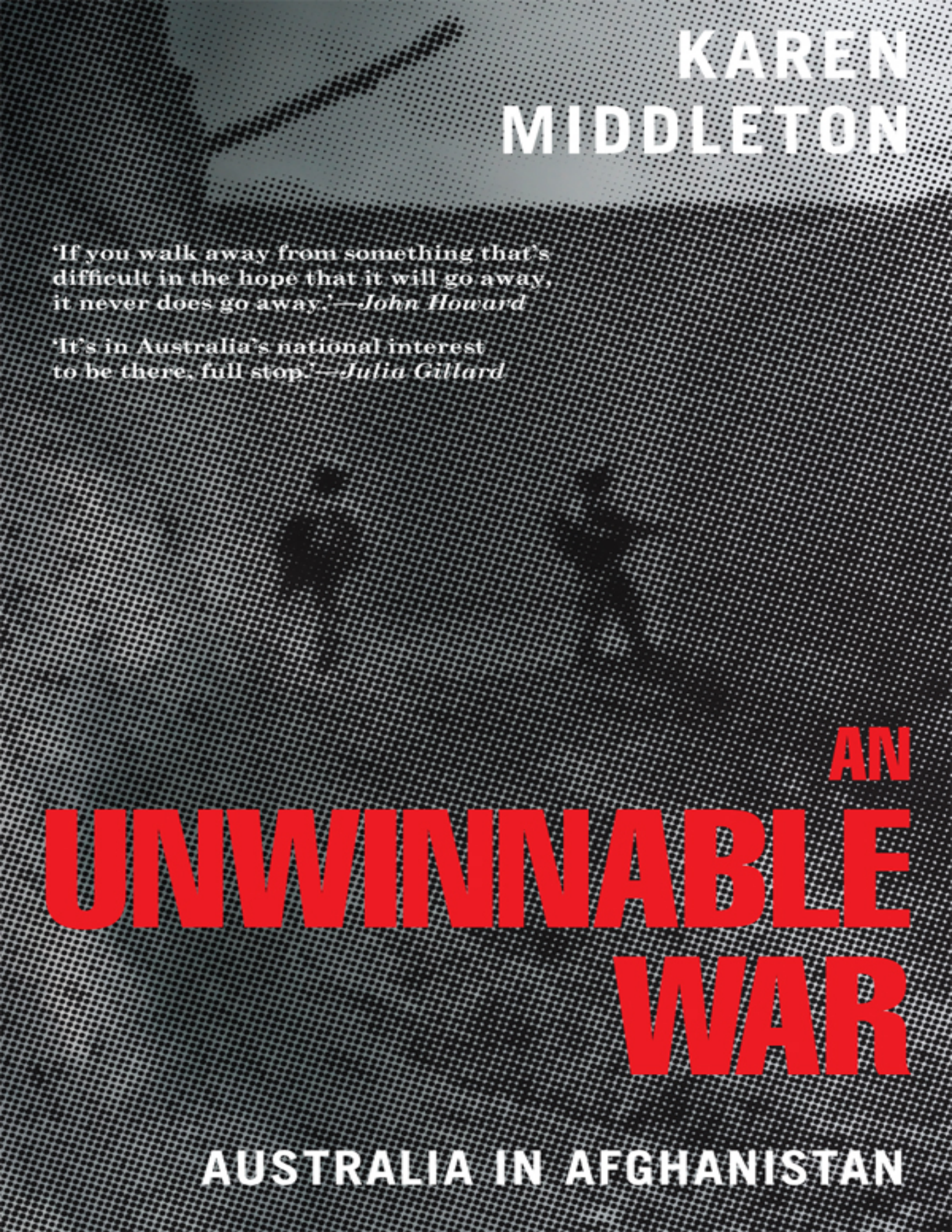
KAREN MIDDLETON
'If you walk away from something that's difficult in the hope that it will go away, it never does go away.'—John Howard
'It's in Australia's national interest to be there, full stop.'—Julia Gillard
AN UNWINNABLE WAR
AUSTRALIA IN AFGHANISTAN

KAREN
MIDDLETON

AN UNWINNABLE WAR

AUSTRALIA IN AFGHANISTAN

MELBOURNE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

For my parents and the women who waved

Contents

1 Tuesday Morning
2 All the Way
3 Rule Number 12
4 On the Ground
5 Sticker Shock
6 The Short Haul
7 Game-changer
8 On Two Fronts
9 Cause and Effect
10 Out by Christmas
11 The Call
12 Going Dutch
13 The Loyalty Card
14 The Red Line
15 God Moments
16 Turning Point
17 Afghanisation
18 Capture or Kill
19 2020 Vision
Acknowledgements
Notes
Index

UZBEKISTAN
CHINA
TAJIKISTAN
TURKMENISTAN
Mazar-i-Sharif
Kunduz
N
W
E
S
AFGHANISTAN
Kabul
Tora Bora
Abbottabad
Jalalabad
URUZGAN
Chora Valley
Tarin Kowt
Shahi-Kot Valley
Kandahar
PAKISTAN
IRAN
FOB Rhino
HELMAND
KANDAHAR
INDIA
0 100 200 300 400 500
KILOMETERS

‘I don’t think you win this war. I think you keep fighting … You have to stay after it. This is the kind of fight we’re in for the rest of our lives and probably our kids’ lives.’

—US Commander David Petraeus,

as quoted in Bob Woodward’s *Obama’s Wars*.

In war, victory should be swift. If victory is slow, men tire, morale sags, sieges exhaust strength; protracted campaigns strain the public treasury … No nation has ever benefited from a protracted war.

—Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*.

1

TUESDAY MORNING

IN ROOM 418 OF the Willard Hotel in Washington DC, September 11 2001 was never going to be a jolly day. By the time the mobile phone alarm did its job, 8 am was already closing in and the rude, bright light of late summer was forcing its way through the cracks in the curtains. I was not feeling well. We were only three days into Prime Minister John Howard's working visit to the United States but, behind the elegant hotel's fourth-floor doors, a few of us among the travelling media were in varying stages of inelegant regret. It seems somehow fitting that the day which would eventually see Australia carried off to a long and messy war should begin, for some, with a nasty hangover.

A prime ministerial news conference loomed at 9.20 am, scheduled by a note stuffed under those same doors. Howard had a busy day ahead and this would be our one chance for questions. Caffeine and codeine were being liberally administered.

By rights, this should have been yesterday's headache. Two nights earlier, we'd been at a spectacular Sunday barbecue in Howard's honour in the grassy grounds of the Australian ambassador's residence. The travelling journalists, photographers and camera crews were a little bit thrilled to queue for lamb and salad in the cool of the evening alongside the likes of Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Colin Powell, even if the feeling wasn't entirely mutual. When *The Age* correspondent, Louise Dodson, and I introduced ourselves to Powell, he seemed taken aback to be rubbing shoulders with the fourth estate.

Australia's ambassador, Michael Thawley, had pulled out all the stops and the careful informality was as striking as the guest list. US President

George W. Bush wasn’t there but all the president’s men—his most senior associates and staff—were. Within two days, hosts and guests alike would look back on the breezy warmth of that night on the front lawn as being from another time. Howard would later describe it as ‘the idle hill of summer’, like A.E. Housman’s war poem of the same name. There wouldn’t be another soirée like it again, not for the next decade at least.

After an upbeat few hours, some among the fourth estate would have kicked on but for the confounded obligation on reporters everywhere to spend some time actually reporting. Deadlines and common sense prevailed.

The next day would bring Howard’s first official talks with President Bush at the White House, and later we would delight in the added newsiness of a surprise private dinner between Howard and News Ltd chief, Rupert Murdoch. By the time Monday night rolled around we were ready for a beverage.

And so it was that some of us found ourselves facing a particularly crusty Tuesday, thanks to an over-indulgence in conviviality and under-indulgence in sleep. Of all the mid-week mornings to wake feeling sideways, this was not the ideal choice.

*

Several floors up, the Prime Minister surfaced considerably earlier and in much better shape, beginning his day in the usual way—brusquely, in a tracksuit and outdoors.

Howard particularly enjoyed walking along the US capital’s wide boulevards and past its impressive monuments. He ventured out, the globe over, in all but the worst weather, and this morning provided no barometric obstacle. The sky was flawless. It would become something remarked upon down the years by those who were there on that day—how the events of later that morning came, so literally, out of the blue.

As the city was waking, Howard and his chief media adviser, Tony O'Leary, and other besneakered members of his travelling party headed south towards the National Mall, veering west through Constitution Gardens to the Vietnam Memorial. These morning walks regularly doubled as informal planning meetings: a chance to toss around the upcoming schedule, discuss the day's media message and generally shoot the breeze.

When they reached the Lincoln Memorial the group looped back, heading north until they got to the White House. They turned right along Pennsylvania Avenue and passed the postcard view of the big white building and its famous sprawling South Lawn. Within hours, this driveable thoroughfare would be permanently closed to motor traffic, and in future this would be the only way to get close to the presidential home—on foot.

The Prime Minister had been at the White House the previous day, sitting in the Oval Office, pleased at the chance to confer in these surroundings with kindred conservative George W. Bush. It had never been thus with Bush's predecessor, Bill Clinton, who once kept him waiting, sitting in his car at the White House gate, in the rain. (Clinton had a reputation for being less than punctual and Howard always professed not to have been much bothered.)

This time it was different. The gathered journalists had shouted questions from the Rose Garden as he and Bush had strolled along the portico to the residence for lunch. 'Prime Minister, how have you found the talks so far with Mr Bush?' the Ten Network's Deborah Knight called out to a beaming Howard.

'Very good,' he replied. 'We are very close friends … It's a great opportunity to reinforce what a deep friendship it is. And the President and I have got a great similarity of views on many issues. And it's a great experience to be able to exchange them with somebody who has the views he does.'

Bush called it an 'honour' to host his Australian friend. 'I look forward to the Prime Minister's continuing advice,' the President said. 'We've had a

great discussion about the Far East and his advice is very valuable for our foreign policy. There's nothing like a friend who'll tell the truth.'

*

But walking that next morning, Howard's mind was quickly back on home. Ansett Airlines was about to collapse and the government was preparing its response. Heading for the hotel, he spoke by phone to the Treasurer, Peter Costello, who was in Canberra trying to help sort through the Ansett mess. Costello relayed a conversation he had had with the airline's liquidators. They said they needed $200 million to keep Ansett afloat. When Costello asked how long that would last, they told him: 'Two days'. In their phone call, the two men confirmed their resolve not to bail out Australia's second air carrier. In a footnote to history, each recalled that it was the other who phoned that morning. At any rate, the conversation was brief.

As Howard walked into the hotel lobby, he was met by a clutch of travelling correspondents hoping for some early words, and mindful that in the southern hemisphere the clock was much further around the dial. The Prime Minister declined their invitation to preempt his own news conference and went upstairs to have breakfast. He was due to speak to them an hour or so later in the John F. Kennedy suite, which doubled as a press conference venue and media working room.

Just before 9 am Howard's chief media adviser, Tony O'Leary, had walked into the official party's working rooms to find the Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Max Moore-Wilton, watching CNN.

'A plane's just flown into the World Trade Center,' Moore-Wilton told him. When O'Leary went on to Howard's suite he mentioned what he had just been told. Both believed it was probably a horrible accident. O'Leary went back to his room and recalls phoning home to tell his family what had happened in New York. Father and son were watching television together on opposite sides of the world as a second plane struck the twin towers.

O’Leary sprinted back to Howard’s suite and the Prime Minister flicked on the television.

They both knew then that this was no accident.

*

Downstairs in 418, my self-inflicted suffering prompted a departure from the morning routine. I threw myself into the shower to wash away the bass beat in my skull and did not switch on the unbearable cheeriness of America’s morning television presenters.

So when the news arrived just before 9 am that would make this one of the most dramatic journalistic days, it didn’t come live on CNN but via the jangle of that confounded mobile phone and the insistent voice of a colleague on *The West Australian*’s news desk in Perth. ‘Are you in New York yet or still in Washington?’ he asked, with puzzling urgency.

‘Washington,’ I told him, a bit irritated at pointless morning questions. The Prime Minister had meetings set for late the following day at the World Financial Center, below the World Trade Center’s twin towers, but first he was to give an address to a joint meeting of Congress here in Washington. The news desk had the itinerary. ‘We go to New York tomorrow. Why?’

His explanation did what medication, caffeine and hot running water had not yet managed. A plane had hit the Trade Center. I grabbed the remote control and saw the billowing smoke.

Two of my friends, New Yorkers Liz Johnson and Greg Weber, had been at the bar on the 107th floor of the Center’s north tower the night before. The manager of the audaciously named The Greatest Bar on Earth had finally persuaded Johnson, a food-writer, and her journalist husband to come and do his cocktail-mixing course. They had been planning to take me there. Twenty-four hours later, she would pen a poignant piece for their newspaper, *The Journal News*, under the headline ‘The Last Night at The Greatest Bar on Earth’.

A few minutes later, a second plane ploughed into the south tower, live against the brilliant September sky. I was well awake now as adrenaline drowned the headache. This was going to be some day.

*

When Howard walked into his news conference, his secret service detail looked more serious than usual, if that was possible. The unfolding events in New York had stunned the travelling correspondents and the room was quiet.

‘Could I just say before I start on any domestic things how horrified I am at what I have just heard regarding what’s happened in New York,’ Howard began. ‘I don’t know any more than anybody else, but it appears to be a most horrific, awful event that will obviously entail a very big loss of life.’

The Prime Minister’s voice cracked slightly on the last few words and his face set in the way it often did when he knew the news would be grim.

‘What was your reaction when you saw those pictures?’ asked Channel Seven correspondent Glenn Milne.

‘Oh, dreadful. Just appalling.’ Howard paused. ‘Awful.’

Milne continued: ‘Will it affect the New York leg of …’

Howard interrupted him. Milne had wanted the cameras to film Howard walking in past the television images of the blazing buildings. Fearing their boss would be accused of capitalising on the horrific incident, the Prime Minister’s staff had refused. Howard had come in another door.

‘I don’t know,’ Howard responded. ‘It’s relatively unimportant. Compared with what’s at stake in something like that. I don’t know.’

Milne persisted. ‘But will you be reviewing that?’

‘Well, it’s too early to say. I’ve only just heard, you’ve only just heard. It’s only just happened. And obviously the authorities here will be responding accordingly. And I’ll let you know.’

Milne tried once more. ‘Will you be taking advice from the US administration?’

‘I’ll be doing whatever is the sensible thing, Glenn, but it’s only happened quarter of an hour ago.’

Howard himself had no more to go on than those gathered in front of him. ‘I was still trying to assimilate it,’ he recalled. ‘I sensed that it was a planned terrorist attack … I don’t think at that point I had started to think, you know, who would it be?’

Nobody among the fourteen reporters in the room came up with anything else to ask regarding the events in New York. My own mind was racing. I kept thinking of my friends and their friends, some of whom worked in downtown Manhattan. I would discover later that one of them had been doing contract work on the lower floors of one of the towers that morning. He had escaped from the building and walked all the way home to Brooklyn, one of the thousands who fled Lower Manhattan, streaming across the famous Brooklyn Bridge on foot.

After almost exactly a minute dwelling on the New York situation, the questions turned to matters at home. The government was already juggling two troublesome issues. Along with the Ansett crisis, a group of asylum seekers had been picked up by a Norwegian freighter, the MV *Tampa*, off Australia’s north-west coast, and the government had refused to allow it to dock. Matters were about to be complicated further by a successful legal challenge in the Federal Court. SBS television’s Dennis Grant asked for a response to the ruling.

‘I’m very disappointed,’ Howard said, shifting to a subject for which he was better prepared. ‘We will appeal.’

For the next 14 minutes, the exchanges continued on asylum seekers, Ansett and Labor’s attitude to both. These issues alone would normally have kept us well occupied for that day’s news cycle. But their importance would evaporate soon after Howard’s last words had been uttered.

When he’d had enough, the Prime Minister wound things up. Ignoring Milne’s final fishing attempt on an Ansett bail-out package, he skirted the

rows of chairs and headed for the back of the room where the now-restless secret service agents were waiting.

A minute or so earlier an agent had rushed in, passing Channel Nine cameraman Mark Jessop who was moving into the hall to film Howard leaving. Sensing something more amiss, Jessop followed him back in. The agents had received new information through their earpieces. Out the window, across the river, Jessop could see that the Pentagon was on fire. O'Leary saw it too. In an agitated whisper he urged the cameraman not to tell the journalists. With Howard unaware, he didn't want his boss ambushed when he hadn't been briefed. Jessop ignored the instruction and leaned down to tell the television reporters, one by one.

As Howard was rounding the last row of seats on his way out, ABC correspondent Jim Middleton sounded the new alarm: 'There's been an explosion at the Pentagon now.' The low, five-pointed building which houses the massive US Defense Department was in direct line of sight across the Potomac. Sure enough, smoke was spiralling from one wall. 'My recollection is of the curtains being pulled back in the press conference room and seeing the smoke,' Howard said.

Howard had been at the Pentagon the previous afternoon, just after visiting the White House. It would also emerge later that an Australian Defence Force officer on secondment was inside, separated from the blazing wreckage by, literally, a fire door. As Howard has noted since, we might all have seen American Airlines Flight 77 hurtle flat and low into US military headquarters over his right shoulder a few minutes earlier, had we not closed the curtains behind him to limit the glare.

The Prime Minister's security detail hurried him out into the elevator and back upstairs. Responsible for the safety of the only visiting head of government in the US on that day, the secret service was taking no chances. 'Look, we're getting out of here,' the head of his security team, the secret service's George Edwards, explained. 'I haven't lost anyone yet, and I don't intend to start today.'

The agents bundled him back to his suite on the secure sixth floor while they worked out where to take him next.

*

Back in Canberra, Howard's colleagues were having a trying week. Ansett was chewing up a lot of hours and now the *Tampa* issue was also commanding attention. As Ansett teetered towards receivership, they became highly preoccupied with trying to figure out how to manage the coming disruption to public transport, the job losses and the political fallout which would follow.

As acting Prime Minister, National Party leader John Anderson was at the top of the tree, and as Transport Minister he already had particular responsibility for Ansett. The previous Sunday morning, on his farm at Mullaley in north-west New South Wales, Anderson had taken a 6 am call from Air New Zealand. It was bad news. The kiwi carrier was not prepared to come to Ansett's rescue. Anderson recalls it as 'a pretty tense conversation'. Furious, he chartered a plane to Canberra that afternoon to work out what to do next.

The phone calls continued back and forth across the Tasman throughout Sunday and Monday. Anderson also spoke repeatedly with Howard, who had flown out on his US trip on Saturday. The next two days and nights were a blur of negotiations, and by Tuesday night Anderson hadn't slept more than six hours in the previous 48. Adding to his frustration, he had had to move hotels. The unscheduled arrival in Canberra had left his chosen abode, the now-demolished Embassy Motel, in the inner-southern suburb of Deakin, unable to accommodate him for more than two nights. On Tuesday September 11, the court ruling on the MV *Tampa* prompted yet another conversation with Howard around dinner time. At 9.30 pm an exhausted Anderson fell into bed at the York Apartments in Kingston, not far from Parliament House, and passed out.

Just over 90 minutes later, the acting Prime Minister was deeply asleep when a ringing phone roused him. Anderson's media adviser, Paul Chamberlin, was making a fifth attempt to wake his boss. Chamberlin knew how tired he was and had thought carefully about how to pierce the befuddlement of slumber and convey the seriousness of the situation. He had settled on the words 'America is under attack', but it took so long for Anderson to answer that, when he did, Chamberlin simply barked, 'Turn on the damn TV!' Bleary-eyed, Anderson watched as the second plane crashed, trying to comprehend what he was seeing. He hung up and phoned his chief of staff, Peter Langhorne. Then the Australian Federal Police (AFP) rang; counter-terrorism protocols were being triggered and, among other measures, security was being upgraded at the US and Israeli embassies, both considered at risk from known terrorist groups.

Because he was acting Prime Minister, Anderson was told the police would also round up and protect his wife, Julia, and their children. He discovered later that the officers dispatched to retrieve them got lost and couldn't find the farm. Julia Anderson and her young children managed to protect themselves just fine.

Likewise, Howard's two adult children, Melanie and Richard, who were confined to his Sydney residence, Kirribilli, where the protection was already pretty solid. Their mother, Janette Howard, was with their dad in Washington. Brother Tim had made it a mini reunion. He'd been on a working holiday in London since April and had flown in to catch up with his folks and watch his father address Congress.

Awake, Anderson now also found himself confined. The police insisted he not go to Parliament House and told him to stay where he was. With Parliament in recess, ministers and officials were scattered across the country. He picked up the phone again and started to track them down.

*

Not surprisingly, the Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, was not on Anderson's contact list. He and his media adviser, Greg Turnbull, were in Melbourne, heading back to their city hotel from a candidate fundraiser at the Berwick Bowling Club in the outer suburbs. They were just passing the Melbourne Cricket Ground when deputy chief of staff, Mike Pezzullo, called from Canberra. During his standard end-of-day briefing Pezzullo told them a plane had just flown into the World Trade Center. Questioned about the type of aircraft, Pezzullo turned on the television and reported that it was a commercial jet. For a few minutes, the three dwelt on the fate of the passengers and those inside the burning building. By the time the car had reached the hotel in Exhibition Street the second plane had hit.

Beazley was in no doubt it was a terrorist attack. His thoughts turned to the upcoming election and his second contest with John Howard. The date was yet to be announced and the opinion polls had finally begun to register him as having a fighting chance. His mind went back to 1963, when the assassination of John F. Kennedy had punctuated an Australian election campaign. Beazley and his siblings asked their politician father, Kim senior, if the Labor Opposition was going to win. No, their father said, we won't win now. 'He said: "Always the Australian people will vote for security in a crisis and that will ensure that we don't win",' Beazley said. 'So I was reminded of my childhood experience.' He felt that this unfolding drama would change everything. 'Well,' he said to Turnbull, with characteristic pessimism. 'There goes the election.'

*

At home in Adelaide, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer was also thinking sombrely about the implications. He'd had a big few days, having celebrated his 50th birthday on Sunday night with a huge party at the Adelaide home of his mother, Lady Mary Downer. In the wake of the hoopla, he was having a quiet week working mostly in his Adelaide Hills electorate and on this evening, a quiet night at home.

Downer was watching ABC TV's *Lateline* when the phone rang. 'Hey, mate,' his adviser, Josh Frydenberg, said, urging him to switch channels. 'Have a look at this. A plane has flown into the World Trade Center.' The scenes were chaotic. Bystanders were speculating about the size of the aircraft and whether it was an accident or an attack. Downer watched for a few minutes, then switched back to the ABC. When *Lateline* finished, he flicked over again and was watching the live coverage when United Airlines flight 175 ploughed into the south face of tower two. Downer was horrified.

Some time after that, the foreign affairs department rang. Officials were activating its consular crisis group to establish how many Australians were affected and to set up a hotline for family and friends back home.

Then Anderson telephoned to discuss what else should be done. Downer assured him he'd had advice that the Prime Minister was safe. Anderson recalled that it wasn't a very long conversation. 'There wasn't a great deal that we knew or could discuss,' he said, a decade on.

Later, the Foreign Minister would field calls from his own friends, including an anxious couple whose son and daughter-in-law lived in downtown Manhattan but were not answering their phone. He and wife Nicky tried ringing themselves, also without success. The young couple later turned up, safe and well.

When they realised the magnitude of what was happening, Alexander and Nicky Downer woke their four children, then aged 11 to 21. The two eldest were university students—one in Adelaide, the other living in Melbourne—and their father's birthday celebrations had prompted a rare gathering of the whole family under one roof. Downer was glad they were all there. He wanted them to see 'a terrible moment in history' unfolding, and they watched the coverage together until 2 am.

*

Back in Canberra, still stuck in his apartment, John Anderson remembers other telephone calls: one incoming from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet; one outgoing to his wife, Julia; and one to Defence Minister Peter Reith, who was in Hobart.

Reith had arrived in Tasmania that afternoon and was back in his hotel room after dinner when his chief of staff, Peter Hendy, called from Canberra with the same instruction being repeated around the country, and likely the world: 'Turn the TV on.'

'It was a shocking event,' Reith recalled. 'People were shocked by what happened—shocked to hear of it. I think there was a bit of a sense of "now what"? Is there something coming our way?'

Reith spoke to his department and had a short conversation with Anderson. 'I remember having that sense of uncertainty as to whether things would develop or whether this was just the start of something that had other elements to it.' Despite the sense of urgency, there wasn't much else that could be done, not until they knew something more.

When the AFP called Anderson back with the phone number for a secure line to Washington, the acting Prime Minister rang Howard. 'It was the clearest line I've ever spoken on,' he recalled. It was a sober conversation. Howard told Anderson the situation was very serious but that it wasn't known yet who was responsible. 'We canvassed the possibility that there could be a series of attacks in other parts of the world including the remote possibility of Australia,' Howard said.

There was also the pressing problem of how to get him home. The US State Department was working on that. They understood he needed to get back to Australia and, allied friendships notwithstanding, it was also better for them if he was out of the country—and off their hands—as quickly as possible. But with US airspace closed, it wasn't going to be easy.

Later, Anderson would reflect on those strange and manic few days. He had begun the previous weekend at a regional development conference in Tamworth listening to worrying statistics on indigenous education; then he found himself confronting the nightmare of a national airline collapse; and

suddenly, he was faced with the potentially global implications of a terrorist attack. Having retired from politics in 2007, he looks back on that time and shakes his head. ‘It was a dreadful week … by far the worst week of my political life. It was an absolute nightmare because you just didn’t know what was going to come next.’

At about 1.30 am, Anderson decided there was little more he could do that night, especially confined to his room. *I must be beginning to look like death warmed up*, he thought. He was conscious that, the following morning, it would be his job to front the media—the nation—and reassure Australians that everything was alright. *My responsibility to the Australian people is going to be an important one*, Anderson told himself. He went back to bed.

*

Bundled back to his own hotel suite, Howard was initially most concerned for his wife and son. Janette and Tim Howard had gone out sightseeing and seen the Pentagon ablaze from their car. The Prime Minister’s chief secret service agent, George Edwards, assured him they were fine, saying, ‘Oh, they’re in touch, we’ll look after them. They’ll go to a safe place.’ The designated safe place was a firehouse near central DC. Howard rang his daughter, Melanie, to let her and her brother know the rest of the family was unharmed.

Standing around in the prime ministerial suite, Howard and his staff discussed where he should go. The hotel—which the managers were preparing to evacuate—was just a block from the White House, where soldiers with anti-aircraft guns were being positioned on the roof. Howard’s advisers decided he should go to the Australian embassy on Massachusetts Avenue, just near Dupont Circle, and off they went.

Not all of his staff made it into the motorcade. Some managed a lift in another secret service car a short time later and recall the driver mounting the footpaths to get around the gridlock of traffic-clogged streets. The Prime

Minister's executive assistant stayed behind to pack up the Howards' belongings and made her way later, on foot, dragging the luggage. Two AFP officers also travelled the old-fashioned way, arriving at the embassy with their suit coats flapping, dripping in sweat, having covered the eight blocks north and four more west at a flat sprint. Janette and Tim Howard soon joined the rest of the official party at the embassy.

A group of Australian corporate executives—many of them the chiefs of Australia's biggest companies—were also in Washington as part of a business delegation. When the emergency was sounded, they had just arrived at the Chamber of Commerce, and an embassy staffer was dispatched to intercept them and tell them what was happening.

The group of Australians was taken downstairs to the most secure part of the building: the basement tool room, two floors below ground, where the embassy's maintenance staff worked. Before they arrived, there was a flurry of tidying up. Somebody noticed the workshop décor and, mindful that it wasn't just the Prime Minister coming but his wife, too, staff had just enough time to tear the collection of girlie calendars off the walls before the visitors were escorted in. When he was first told of the concern for Mrs Howard's sensibilities, almost ten years later, Howard laughed. 'I think she could've handled that,' he said.

Inside the 'bunker', as it became known, Howard set himself up in front of a small television and began making phone calls. With the help of the embassy's congressional liaison officer, he spoke to the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Dennis Hastert, to confirm that he clearly did not expect to be giving his scheduled congressional address the following day, but would still like to visit to express his condolences in person.

Janette Howard moved around the suite of rooms, making sure everyone had at least tried to phone their families at home. Tim Howard and one of his father's media advisers, Scott Bolitho, found a tennis ball and started tossing it between them to pass the time.

Eventually, the US ambassador to Australia, Tom Schieffer, arrived. It remains normal practice that when an Australian leader visits another

country, the host country's chief diplomat in Australia travels, too. Aside from the secret service, Schieffer was the first US official Howard had seen since the morning's shocking events. The Prime Minister told the ambassador how distressed he was for the American people and the two men embraced.

In the early afternoon, Howard was taken upstairs to the embassy's theatrette where we journalists were waiting.

*

When the Pentagon was hit, the media group gathered in the John F. Kennedy suite had scattered. Some headed down to the hotel ballroom, where guests were being marshalled. Like others, I went out into the streets but realised quickly that it wasn't possible to get close to the burning building across the river. As news of the attacks spread, Washingtonians began pouring out of their offices and away from the city centre. Fire engines and police cars lined the blocks around the White House.

I thought of my family. My father was travelling abroad and my mother was home alone in Canberra. Once she heard of the attacks, she would be out of her mind with worry. Two of her three children were in the US—my brother was working on the other side of the country in Salt Lake City, Utah. Like Mum, our sister was in Canberra, but it was after midnight there and both were probably asleep. Should I wake them just to say I was alright, or let them sleep and risk not being able to contact them later? I decided my mother would rather lose sleep knowing I was fine than wake in the morning and panic. When I rang, the words 'terrorist attack' took a few repeats to register. As predicted, she lay awake the rest of the night but when the mobile phone network crashed soon after, I was glad I'd called. We let my sister sleep.

Australian television correspondents and camera crews joined others filming the commotion and then scattered again; with networks going live at home, they needed to get their material and themselves to air.

On the way back towards the hotel, there was a sudden boom. As I wrote at the time, it was loud enough to cause your chest cavity to shudder and your skin to bristle. Mistakenly reported as a bomb at the State Department, it was later thought to be more ignition at the Pentagon. Then came the sudden sound of a jet engine overhead. The aircraft wasn't visible but it had to be flying low because the noise was ear-splitting. In what seemed like slow motion, all along the street people looked up. Was this another hijacked plane? After a very long second or two, a military jet came screaming across the sky, scrambled from Andrews Air Force base and, I later heard, probably headed for Pennsylvania. I swear, for those few seconds my heart stopped.

By the time I reached the hotel, the entrances had been cordoned off and our other colleagues were gathered out front. The embassy's public affairs officer, Sandi Logan, persuaded hotel staff to let us retrieve laptops and other essentials before we headed for the embassy on foot, passing soldiers from the National Guard jogging the other way down 14th Street, rifles in hand. The State Department's protocol chief, and our media escort on these official visits, 75-year-old Mary Masserini, was making her way in the other direction, too. Masserini walked with the aid of a stick, but declined our offer of help, explaining she was going to look for her staff. We would see her later at the embassy and again on subsequent visits before she retired in 2006 after 58 years in the job, having served every president since Truman.

As we legged it to the embassy, we tried to use our mobile phones to update those at home. Repeated attempts to get lines out failed as the communications network struggled with massive overloading. Suddenly, inexplicably, my phone rang. It was the concerned younger sister of a close friend calling from Canberra to make sure I was alright. Having somehow managed to be the only one to get through, she was loaded up with messages to pass on. She still gets in touch every September 11.

At the embassy, we waited in the theatrette where a giant video screen was showing traumatised New Yorkers fleeing, chased by rolling clouds of

ash and dust, as the buildings shuddered and slid to earth, on repeat.

The newspapers back home were publishing special editions, and radio and television had broken into normal programming. Correspondents frantically dictated stories and delivered broadcast reports whenever we could get a line out. Sandwiches and drinks appeared, courtesy of the embassy staff. We worked and waited, for what we weren't sure.

*

When he appeared for his second news conference that day, Howard was visibly upset. He had begun to reflect on what had befallen the United States and was already feeling the impact of being witness to the events. There would be debate down the years over whether his presence in Washington that day affected his judgment.

Ten years on, few among his closest associates believe Australia's initial military response would have been different had he not been there. But they do acknowledge how deeply it affected him. So does he:

> I think it is true that Australia would've done essentially the same thing whether or not I had been in Washington at the time. I think that is right. But it is also the case that being in Washington at the time, and understanding the sense of violation and outrage that the Americans felt, I better understood the subsequent American behaviour not only in relation to Afghanistan but also in relation to Iraq.

At least one official in the travelling party would later warn colleagues at home that they needed to be prepared for the depth of Howard's feeling. He was certain these attacks would sear themselves on America's heart, traumatise its people and leave scars.

Howard's words that afternoon and at a third news conference the following day would commit Australia to a war not yet even declared. On

the stage in the theatrette, Howard began by reading a letter he had drafted in the basement, to President Bush.

> Dear Mr President,
>
> The Australian Government and people share the sense of horror experienced by your nation at today's catastrophic events and the appalling loss of life. I feel the tragedy even more keenly being here in Washington at the moment. In the face of an attack of this magnitude, words are always inadequate in conveying sympathy and support. You can, however, be assured of Australia's resolute solidarity with the American people at this most tragic time. My personal thoughts and prayers are very much with those left bereaved by these despicable attacks on the American people and the American nation.

Howard described it as an 'outrageous act of war' and a tragic 'day of infamy' for the United States, deliberately echoing President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's response to the attack on Pearl Harbor which drew America into World War II.

And he added his own sentiment—and resolve:

> Words aren't very adequate, but they are a sign that we feel for our American friends, that we will stand by them, we will help them, we will support actions they take to properly retaliate in relation to these acts of bastardry against their citizens and against what they stand for. America has been hurt by today's events but the American spirit will not be daunted or bowed or diminished by these events. The resolution of the American people will be evident and they will respond in accordance with the courageous traditions of their country.

The spirit was evident that evening as members of Congress stood on the steps of the Capitol in a bipartisan gesture of unity and defiance. At the end of their news conference, they bowed their heads in a moment of silence and then spontaneously broke into song. ‘God bless America,’ they sang, arms around each other. ‘My home, sweet home.’

The following night, hundreds of young Americans gathered there too, in a vigil around the pool of reflection. They sang anthems into the darkness, and walked together up the Mall to the Washington Monument and across to the White House, called to rally by an email that read: ‘Bring a candle or a flag’.

*

Back home, the Foreign Minister was also contemplating the American response, but in a slightly different way.

Speaking to his chief of staff, Mike Smith, on the phone that same night, as he and other senior members of the government began to wonder what it all meant, Downer remarked that, from then on, nothing would be the same. He correctly predicted what a unified America might do in response. ‘The Americans will wreak terrible vengeance on the people who did this,’ he recalled telling Smith. ‘They’ll stop at nothing.’

2

ALL THE WAY

AS ARTHUR SINODINOS WALKED into Parliament House, just after dawn on 12 September 2001, there was a strange mood beyond the usual quiet of the early hour. Sinodinos, Howard's chief of staff, had opted not to go with his boss to Washington. With a bevy of politically trying matters at home, he had sat this one out. Senior adviser Tony Nutt went instead.

Like so many others, Sinodinos watched the events in the United States unfold at home on television in appalled disbelief. 'I spoke as soon as I could to the travelling team that night,' he said. He recalled making a reassuring phone call to media adviser Tony O'Leary's wife, Susan, and then preparing for the meetings on national security which were being hurriedly arranged for the following day.

Next morning, the sense of strangeness only deepened when Sinodinos encountered the Nine television network's political editor, Laurie Oakes, prowling the corridors of the ministerial wing with a camera at 6 am. That certainly didn't happen every day. 'I thought, what's he doing here?' Sinodinos said. 'We exchanged pleasantries, and said it was all pretty serious, and left it at that.'

Oakes also bailed up the acting Prime Minister, John Anderson, as he arrived after his short and fitful sleep. Mindful of the police warnings that he'd been assigned extra personal security, Anderson had woken repeatedly through the night, thinking he heard footsteps outside his apartment door. As he came up from the Parliament House car park just after 6 am, the elevator doors opened to reveal the veteran journalist and a cameraman. The light was on.

'Mr Anderson, what does this mean?' Oakes asked the bleary-eyed acting Prime Minister. Anderson wished he knew. Like Sinodinos, all he did

know was that there was a big day ahead.

The heads of the security agencies and some of their senior staff had been at their desks all night, having returned to work as soon as it was clear the incident in New York was a terrorist attack. The government's Counter-Terrorism Committee had convened in the early hours to discuss provisional protective arrangements for buildings deemed potential targets. Another meeting was set for early morning in the Deputy Prime Minister's office to brief him on what they knew.

The attacks had created a sense of both crisis and impotence in Canberra. Over in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in the suburb of Barton, down the hill from Parliament House, what was then a tiny Defence, Intelligence and Security Branch had gone into overdrive trying to work out what to do. Already busy with the controversy over the asylum seekers aboard the Norwegian freighter, MV *Tampa*, its 11 members now found, overnight, that they had a much bigger issue to contend with.

From the early hours, the television hanging in the middle of their office was tuned to CNN. Normally only used to watch parliamentary broadcasts, it would stay on the US coverage all day—the images of planes crashing into the towers and the towers crashing to earth playing over and over in a morbid loop. With this as a backdrop, the branch set about establishing what useful help Australia might offer the United States. There wasn't a lot, practically, which could be done, beyond reviewing aviation and other security and assuring the political leadership that precautions were being taken.

Around mid-morning in Canberra, Anderson convened another meeting with the key agency representatives—this time, a phone hook-up to discuss the implications of the previous night's events for Australia. Meetings on national security were normally held in the most secure area of Parliament House, the Cabinet room. But the Cabinet room had been closed temporarily and so those who were in Canberra gathered in a meeting room next to the Prime Minister's press office, where there was both a long conference table and a speaker phone.

The line-up was a kind of hybrid of the National Security Committee (NSC) and the government's parliamentary leadership group. Sinodinos was there, along with other senior officials. 'Because it had happened over there, [we were] worried about what might happen here,' Sinodinos said. 'You take precautions but there's no evidence anything was being cooked up here … It was a bit pro-forma in a way.'

As acting Prime Minister, Anderson was running proceedings. Treasurer Peter Costello had caught the first flight to Canberra from Melbourne, but other key ministers were spread across the country, linked in by phone.

The Chief of the Defence Force, Admiral Chris Barrie, wasn't able to join the call. He was mid-air over the central Australian desert, on his way back from Western Australia. Barrie had been at dinner with an old shipmate and his wife at their home in the Perth suburb of Bicton the night before, when news of the attacks came through. The two men recalled that the last time they had dined together was more than 30 years earlier in port at Long Beach, California, on the night US Attorney-General Robert Kennedy was shot and killed at the Ambassador Hotel in 1968. They resolved, with the black humour of terrible times, that perhaps it would be best not to have dinner together again. Barrie caught the first available flight back to Canberra, leaving Perth at about 7 am.

Convening the meeting with colleagues around the country, Anderson explained what he knew of the situation, relaying the content of his conversations with Howard and explaining that the Americans were trying to make arrangements to get the Prime Minister and his party home.

Anderson asked ASIO chief Dennis Richardson to give an overview of the intelligence analysis and run through who might be responsible. There was a list of questions. What, if any, were the domestic implications? Could this be part of a sequence of attacks in which Australia might feature? Was it, in some way, a direct threat?

There were long pauses in the conversation. The enormity of the assault was still sinking in.

*

As leader of the government in the Senate, Robert Hill was involved in the discussion. Two months later, Howard would make him defence minister to replace the retiring Reith, declining to alter his decision despite an expression of interest from Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock. Ruddock would become the Coalition's poster boy during the upcoming election campaign, prompting Howard to ask him what job he might want. In the end, by agreement, he stayed put, although Howard put him on the National Security Committee as a consolation prize.

For now, though, Robert Hill held the environment portfolio. As the planes fell from the sky in the United States, Hill was in the Northern Territory meeting with indigenous leaders over dinner at the Gagadju Crocodile Hotel in Jabiru, in the sprawling Kakadu National Park. Boasting the town's flashest—and most kitsch—accommodation, the hotel is shaped like a 250-metre crocodile.

From back home in Adelaide, Hill's wife, Diana, had sent him a message during dinner, alerting him to the US attacks. A flurry of phone calls had followed. With plans for the morning conference call eventually in place, Hill figured there was no point disrupting the next day's schedule. Early in the morning, he flew to the Galiwin'ku community on Elcho Island, off the north-east coast of Arnhem Land. He eventually took Anderson's call on his mobile phone, overlooking the community's beautiful beach. He remembers standing there above the water, struck by the surreal contrast between the tranquillity before him and the shocking violence being discussed. 'Everybody was obviously still very stunned about the horror of what had happened and still very confused about what it all meant,' Hill said. 'And this was sort of taking stock to see that the basic essentials that needed to be done from a government's point of view at home were being done.'

In the almost twelve hours since the attacks, those assembled had found themselves reflecting with persistent disbelief on what had happened.

In the late afternoon, there was another meeting. By now, Defence Force chief Admiral Chris Barrie had arrived from Perth and he joined the others in the substitute Cabinet room. Anderson called Howard on the speakerphone. The Prime Minister asked Dennis Richardson to explain who he thought was responsible for the attacks. Like other colleagues, Richardson had spent the night at his desk, before going home for a shower at about 6 am and then heading to Parliament House.

Richardson replied that he believed only two known groups had the organisational capacity for such a coordinated assault: the Lebanon-based Shiite fundamentalist organisation Hezbollah, which had links to Iran; and al Qaeda, a militant Islamist network founded in the late 1980s, especially focussed on undermining non-Islamic western governments. Richardson said he believed it was more likely to be al Qaeda. The organisation was already on the international radar, having claimed responsibility for the bombing of the American naval destroyer, USS *Cole,* in the Yemeni port of Aden 13 months earlier, and whose members had financed the previous bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993.

Al Qaeda was led by Saudi national Osama bin Laden. Using the alternative spelling of bin Laden's first name, Australia's defence and security establishment referred to him by the short form: 'UBL'. Cabinet's National Security Committee had been briefed on his activities more than once before. His organisation would soon also be blamed for the assassination of Ahmad Shah Massoud, the leader of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance who was killed in the Afghan province of Takhar two days before the attacks on the US by two suicide bombers posing as journalists. The murder was later deemed to be a deliberate precursor to the September 11 attacks—al Qaeda ensuring it would later receive Taliban protection in return for taking out its chief enemy.

Howard agreed with Richardson's analysis, saying the Americans also believed al Qaeda was to blame. Ambassador Michael Thawley had conveyed that view, following conversations with US officials throughout the day.

The suspected links to Islamic fundamentalists sparked much soul searching within the government. At an NSC meeting on Howard's return to Australia, the Defence chief, Chris Barrie, would urge the ministers to think about how this new fear of fundamentalism might play out in Australian society. He had just read historian Barbara Tuchman's *The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World before the War, 1890–1914*, a collection of essays on a society about to descend into anarchy. 'We have to be very careful about our Islamic communities in Australia,' Barrie told the meeting. He saw a real risk of their isolation from the mainstream.

Barrie's reading of prophetic tomes would continue with his later absorption of Arnold Toynbee's *Civilization on Trial*: a 1948 contemplation on, among other things, the fraught relationship between Islam and the West. Barrie was stunned at how it seemed to have predicted the present confrontation. 'I read that a year or so later and thought, holy heavens,' Barrie said. 'This guy forecast it … It was about the cultural penetration of Islam by western culture … their concern for their young being seduced.'

Others were philosophising, too. For John Anderson, the events would be the start of many years of wrestling with some big existential and theological issues: the clash of cultures, the place of Islam and western ideologies and the idea of good and evil. 'I think I sensed that it was a very deep turning point in global events, and in retrospect I still believe that … And if I wanted to be deep and philosophical about it, I'm tempted to say in future we'll look back on that as the time when postmodernism died. It was, for the West, which had become so wary of mega-narratives, the coming face to face with the reality that pure unadulterated evil still existed.'

Alexander Downer was also deeply shaken. In Adelaide, Downer had kept a pre-existing morning commitment to open an exhibition at the Art Gallery of South Australia. When he arrived, reporters were waiting. He told them:

> Obviously I, and I think all Australians, are profoundly shocked by what's happening. It's my view that this will change the whole

> nature of international politics. I think the international community will be much more aggressive in its approach to terrorism than it's already been. I think the fight against terrorism will be renewed with very great vigour, and I think it needs to be.

More than nine years on, he said: 'I must admit, I felt by my standards surprisingly emotional about it. It's all because I could see this was going to lead to an enormous change in the kind of global paradigm.'

Talking to family, friends and colleagues in those first days, he kept returning to the same thought: *No good will come of this*.

*

In Washington, Howard and his family had spent the night at ambassador Michael Thawley's residence. With the Willard Hotel operating on a skeleton staff, it seemed the most sensible course. It also meant they were away from the city centre—and the White House—should anything more ensue.

Along with the rest of Howard's travelling party, they had gone to the Cleveland Park residence late the previous afternoon. Joined by some of the Australian corporate executives who had also found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, they had another barbecue that evening on the lawn. It was an impromptu gathering, the best way to feed a large group of unexpected guests. In contrast with the event in the same spot two days earlier, the mood was sombre as they all reflected on the day's events.

In the morning, Howard did not take his usual walk. His agents considered it unsafe.

*

Back at the hotel where the rest of Howard's travelling party stayed, the next morning was like a five-star version of a disaster movie. Only essential

staff remained, and breakfast was on offer not in the dining room but the ballroom, where giant television screens were hanging around the walls. The shocking images of lower Manhattan's streets flickered above the tablecloths.

With all flights grounded across the country and other public transport severely disrupted, those wanting to get home were casting around for a lift. A man stood up and called out to the room, 'Is anyone going to South Carolina?'

Here and elsewhere, there was a kind of collective bewilderment. This nation of slick systems and problem-solving had been floored by such a violent rejection of its supremacy. In 2011, former ambassador Michael Thawley recalled the mood of national vulnerability:

> It may seem peculiar to others but this is the first time the US homeland has been attacked. In a way it's worse than Pearl Harbor because it actually is continental US … And people were going around saying, 'Why does the world hate us so much?' And there was this sudden awakening amongst the people of the US as to the depth of hostility.

The shock was even more pronounced in New York, where the city seemed concussed. Forty-eight hours after the attacks, I was standing in a crowd on Lexington Avenue, reading heartbreaking missing persons posters plastered on walls and light poles, when a man in a business suit approached, carrying an American flag and a deli bag of sandwiches. 'Anybody hungry? Need anything to eat?' He was pressing the contents of his bag on strangers at random in a tiny attempt to make things better.

With a hundred bomb scares in the first 24 hours after the Trade Center towers fell and all of Manhattan jittery and stunned, New Yorkers were wondering when it would end. On Sunday morning, September 16, I joined my American friends at their local Episcopalian church in the town of Nyack, in Rockland County, just north of New York City, where a well-

intentioned priest addressed a community dismayed and stricken with grief. During her sermon, she wondered aloud if their country might need to search its own attitudes and policies for the reason such hatred had been visited upon it.

It was certainly what many others were thinking, but not these bereaved people and not on this day. Perhaps it was a contemplation for another time, when more than four days separated this priest's congregation from the loss of their firefighters, students and office workers, their families and their friends. For some, it was simply too much. In the middle of the sermon, parishioners began to stand and challenge her out loud. 'No!' In a scene I have never seen in a place of worship before or since, they literally shouted her down.

*

In Washington, those few days earlier, this kind of visible American trauma was resonating deeply with John Howard. His 12 September congressional address cancelled, he went up to the Hill anyway, not as a feted guest speaker but as an appreciated supporter and witness to a nation's outpourings.

Just after 10 am, the House chaplain, Reverend Daniel Coughlin, opened proceedings in prayer: 'O God, come to our assistance. O Lord, make haste to help us. Yesterday we were stunned, angry and violated. Today, Lord, we stand strong and together. Yesterday changed our world. Today we are changed.'

Howard listened, accompanied by his wife, Janette, and Michael Thawley and his wife, Debbie. They were the only visitors in the gallery, as the Speaker, Dennis Hastert, led the chamber in the pledge of allegiance. Hastert then formally announced that the visiting Australian leader's planned address would not proceed. 'The Chair wishes to acknowledge, however, the presence of the Prime Minister here today, and extends, on behalf of the House, his appreciation for the solidarity of the Australian

people and the presence of the Prime Minister today in this very difficult time,' he said. And, looking up at Howard, 'Thank you.' In a gesture the Prime Minister later described as 'deeply moving', members of the chamber rose in standing ovation.

Afterwards, some approached to thank him in person. Senior California congressman David Dreier pressed upon Howard the importance of his presence, because, he said, by his being there he was showing that some parts of the world still liked America. Over in the Senate chamber, Senator Joe Biden, the man who would become Vice President seven years on, also acknowledged Howard, describing him as 'one of our strongest allies, a man who himself is in deep sympathy and mourning for this nation'.

Just after 11 am, the Senate adjourned for three minutes to allow Howard to go onto the floor. He offered condolences to the senators from New York, Hillary Clinton and Charles Schumer. This personal contact had a huge impact on Howard, a politician and a man whose views are profoundly shaped by his personal experience. He was struck by the calm demeanour and absence of panic in everyone he had encountered since the planes had crashed.

He felt it again outside the Capitol, when the director of the US Senate Radio and Television Press Gallery, Michael Mastrian, approached him. Having recognised the man on the stairs as the Australian prime minister, Mastrian went to see if he needed assistance. After introductions, the two spoke briefly about the previous day's events. The younger man's offer of help and words of reassurance so moved Howard that, back home in Australia, he wrote to thank him and sent a gift—an Australian tie.

Having no further official engagements and with his departure arrangements still in flux, Howard and his family, the Thawleys and some of the travelling party went to the National Cathedral where the daily noon Eucharistic rite became an unofficial memorial service. I and some other reporters went too, joining the rest of the small congregation seated in the choir stalls.

Here, already, the priests were cautioning against vengeance, using the chosen readings to preach peace. From the Old Testament book of Micah there were verses about turning swords into ploughshares. ‘Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.’ The words of the New Testament’s Matthew chapter five urged listeners to turn the other cheek and to ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.’

But Howard also heard another message at the communion service and repeated it later that day at a news conference on the front lawn of Thawley’s residence. Asked about the passage from Matthew cautioning against retribution, Howard replied that it was important to accurately identify the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks so innocents did not suffer.

> But I certainly believe that what was done yesterday was an act of war against the United States. The Americans … having properly identified those responsible, are entitled to retaliate. And I think what we were being urged to do this morning by reference to those passages from Matthew was to be measured and careful. But people have got to be brought to justice and I think the preacher used the words ‘hunted down’. I listened very carefully.

Of the three times Howard addressed journalists in those twenty-four hours, this encounter would become the most significant. Here on the lawn, he committed Australia to war. ‘We haven’t been requested to provide any military assistance but obviously if we were asked to help, we would,’ Howard said. And, recalling his morning in the US Congress, ‘It is very important at a time like this that America knows that she’s got friends.’

Howard acknowledges now that he acted alone that afternoon, without consulting colleagues or seeking Cabinet’s consent.

> There are occasions when a national leader should be preemptive. But I knew that the Australian public would support me. I knew

> my own party would support me. I certainly expected [Opposition leader Kim] Beazley would support me. And it just seemed to me instinctive. And for me to have said: ‘Oh look, I’ll have to discuss that with the Cabinet’. It was just one of those occasions where it seemed entirely the right thing to do.

In the course of that news conference, I asked Howard if he would be concerned by comparisons with then prime minister Bob Hawke’s unilateral and somewhat controversial decision to commit Australian troops to the first Gulf War, back in 1991. ‘Well I didn’t criticise him at the time,’ he replied. Pressed on his own declaration of a few minutes earlier, he said, ‘I will wear that criticism if it comes.’

He went on to repeat his view that it was important for countries like Australia to stand by the United States. ‘I mean, just because you are big and strong doesn’t mean that you can’t feel lonely and you can’t feel that your heart’s been ripped out. And I think it’s very important, therefore, that Americans know that they’ve got some really good, reliable friends.’

Years later, he acknowledges how significant those few minutes were. ‘That news conference really defined what we were going to do,’ Howard said. ‘I mean, I didn’t often do that in my prime-ministership. I was careful. But it was just an occasion where I felt it entirely appropriate.’ In fact, such impulses ran counter to his instincts. It would stand in stark contrast to the decisions he would make afterwards, when his initial response was backed in with more characteristic caution.

Howard revealed in the same news conference that he was leaving for home later that afternoon. With all commercial aircraft still grounded, the US government was providing the Vice President’s plane, Air Force Two, to carry him from the US mainland to Hawaii. From there, he would be collected by a Qantas 747, temporarily reclassified as a military aircraft to get around the aviation ban.

As his news conference ended, Howard asked if the television cameras were turned off. He wanted to speak to the media representatives privately.

‘I’m sorry I can’t take you with me,’ he said, conscious he was leaving us in the midst of national confusion. Some journalists felt he was being disingenuous, others took it as a sincere expression of regret and concern. Either way, few, if any, of us wanted to go. Thanks, we said, but with the world’s biggest news story unfolding around us, we were staying here.

*

Before his news conference, Howard had spoken by phone with the US Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, offering condolences at the loss of life on the previous day. Armitage thanked him and detailed the travel arrangements he had made for later that day.

Armitage was the US administration’s Australia guy—most familiar with its politics and most sympathetic to its position as the little ally. Built like a weightlifter and with a shiny bald pate, Armitage had fought in Vietnam, and served as Deputy Defense Secretary under Ronald Reagan.

In the 24 hours since the attacks, the US government had homed in on al Qaeda as the culprits and was already contemplating retaliatory action in Afghanistan. It had also determined that Pakistan’s attitude would be critical.

In his phone call to Howard, Armitage outlined his views on Pakistan. The following day, it would be his job to call in the Pakistani ambassador and the visiting head of its military intelligence service and lay out seven US demands. They included stopping al Qaeda operatives at the border, breaking ties with the ruling Taliban government in Afghanistan, and granting land and air access to American aircraft and intelligence gatherers.

Armitage told Howard that Pakistan would be made to choose sides and that its president, Pervez Musharraf, with whom Howard would later strike a close relationship, would ‘feel some pain’ to respond quickly. (The imposing US official’s strong-arm tactics secured agreement from Musharraf the same day.)

Armitage didn’t bother to ask Howard if Australia was on board with the US response. ‘There was no need to, I knew what his feelings were,’ Armitage explained in 2011. ‘Had it been another government I think I might’ve wanted to say “get them prepared”. But I didn’t have any reason to think that Mr Howard didn’t have the same views.’

*

On the morning of Thursday, 13 September, Alexander Downer was visiting the Mount Barker council in his electorate when his mobile phone rang. It was John Howard from Air Force Two. The Foreign Minister took a moment to be privately impressed.

Howard and his party had taken off from Washington’s Andrews Air Force Base in the late afternoon, headed for Honolulu. Now, the Prime Minister wanted to talk to Downer about what would happen next. He summarised his discussion with Armitage and said that retaliatory action against Afghanistan was virtually inevitable.

This conversation between Howard and Downer has been cited as the genesis of the idea that they should invoke the ANZUS Treaty—the trilateral agreement between Australia, New Zealand and the US to come to each other’s military aid—for the first time in its history. But an American had thought of it, too.

*

After seeing the Prime Minister safely off at Andrews, ambassador Michael Thawley went home and rang the White House. Aware that retaliation in Afghanistan was already being considered, he was looking for an update.

Thawley’s conversation with Torkel Patterson, President Bush’s Asia director, was brief. The two, who spoke regularly, discussed the state of planning and the reaction in other parts of the world. That morning, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) had invoked Article 5 of its

treaty, determining that the terrorist attacks constituted an act of war against one of its member states. In light of this, Patterson raised the possibility of invoking the ANZUS Treaty.

In a cable he sent to the Foreign Minister immediately after the conversation, Thawley said he thought it was a good idea. He then rang Downer to alert him to the cable's existence and told him he would try to reach Howard by phone on Air Force Two.

But Downer heard from the Prime Minister first. Before the call came, Downer asked his department for some preliminary legal advice on invoking ANZUS. He said this was also before he had heard from Thawley. When Howard rang, Downer was able to put the idea to him and let him know work was underway. 'He said, "Well, what do you think of invoking ANZUS?" … And I sort of instantaneously said … I thought, why not?' Howard recalled.

Neither Prime Minister nor Foreign Minister believed that invoking ANZUS was absolutely necessary to justify Australia's military support for what the United States was expected to do. But both liked the idea. They saw it as an important statement, supported by the parallel actions of NATO, and with some nice symmetry to boot.

Coincidentally, Howard had marked the 50th anniversary of the ANZUS Treaty's signing just the day before the attacks, at a ceremony at Washington's Navy Yard. President Bush was there and, in the first meeting between the men in their respective roles, he presented Howard with the bell from the decommissioned US Navy vessel, the USS *Canberra*, the only American ship then named in honour of an ally's sunken vessel. 'This bell is a reminder of a faithful partner in times of crisis and in times of calm,' Bush told the crowd.

In his own address, Howard declared Australia and the United States had 'lived out the covenants' of the ANZUS Treaty.

> Our two nations and our two societies have demonstrated to the world that values based on freedom and individual liberty in the

> end win acceptance. But they only win acceptance if behind the commitment is a determination on the part of nations who believe in those values to defend them, if necessary fight for them and always be ready to repel those who would seek to take those freedoms away.

The gift of the bell was symbolic. In their telephone conversation two days later, as the Prime Minister flew west across the United States in the lone non-military aircraft in closed US airspace, Howard and Downer agreed one gesture deserved another. Cabinet would later endorse the move, but the decision was taken there, on the phone. They spoke a second time, and then Howard went back to the rear cabin where the US ambassador to Australia, Tom Schieffer, was seated and conveyed his intentions. This was how many decisions were taken throughout the tenure of the Howard government, especially on security—Howard and Downer deciding together, and then getting Cabinet's endorsement.

They correctly forecast no dissent. But Howard's own departmental officials would later secure advice to ensure the legalities of the process, just in case.

*

When Howard and his travelling party landed in Honolulu, a Qantas jumbo jet was waiting. A delegation of Taiwanese officials stranded in Hawaii had heard about the Australian evacuation and was pressing for seats on the plane. But the Americans didn't want every foreigner on US soil thinking they could hitch a ride out, so the Taiwanese request was politely declined.

The Australian government arranged for the aircraft to fly straight to Canberra, given its light load and the recent upgrade of the airport's runway. As it was due to land around dawn on Friday morning, 14 September, before the airport would normally be open, key airport staff, including those in the control tower, had been told they had to come in

early. But when the 747 sought permission to land, it received no response from the tower. The air traffic controller had slept in. The aircraft circled overhead and was ultimately diverted to Sydney, where Howard would find himself confronted by, and having to spontaneously address, frustrated, jobless Ansett workers.

The reaction of his departmental secretary, Max Moore-Wilton, to being stuck in the clouds could almost be heard from the ground.

3

RULE NUMBER 12

HAVING COMMITTED AUSTRALIA TO join any retaliatory military action, John Howard and his government now had to decide what to send. That process began as soon as the Prime Minister landed back in Canberra.

It was mid-morning on Friday, 14 September, when the Prime Minister finally arrived at Parliament House, having taken his unscheduled detour to Sydney. Cabinet was waiting for him. Ministers had flown back in from around the country, some caught up in the Ansett crisis as the receivers brought down the final gavel on its operations. Robert Hill had caught the last Ansett flight out of Darwin and found himself, with other passengers, dumped in Sydney with no onward flight to Canberra until Qantas stepped in.

John Howard had, of course, flown the furthest. John Anderson was particularly glad to see him back. ‘The PM must’ve been utterly exhausted, but he was at the top of his game,’ the former deputy prime minister said.

The Cabinet meeting would occupy much of the day, involving an almost-three-hour discussion about the fate of Ansett and its workers. But first, ministers spent an hour or more on the terrorist attacks and the proposal to invoke the ANZUS Treaty.

Howard began by briefing his colleagues on his experiences in the United States. He wanted to convey what he felt was the deep impact of the attacks on the American people. ‘He said we needed to be aware of the enormous effect on the American psyche of the attacks and to put ourselves in their shoes and to recognise how scarring it would be,’ Anderson said. ‘And he was of the view that the American response would be resolute.’

Howard told them the US was already in no doubt that those responsible for the attacks had been trained in, and received support from, Afghanistan.

Determined to retaliate, he said that was where the Americans would strike. ‘I sensed that while they wanted the support of the rest of the world, they probably only wanted military involvement from a number of countries, one of which would be Australia,’ Howard said. Cabinet endorsed invoking Article IV of ANZUS, which recognises that an armed attack on any of the parties ‘would be dangerous to its own peace and safety’, and declares that each ‘would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes’. It provides that any such attack must be reported to the UN Security Council and those measures in response ‘terminated’ when the Security Council had taken its own steps to restore international peace and security.

Later in the day, Howard announced the invocation ‘in consultation with the United States’.

> The decision is based on our belief that the attacks have been initiated and coordinated from outside the United States. This action has been taken to underline the gravity of the situation and to demonstrate our steadfast commitment to work with the United States in combating international terrorism.

The Labor Opposition supported the move and produced a 10-point security response plan. The Opposition Leader Kim Beazley said invoking ANZUS was the anchor. ‘We thought it ought to be done. We weren’t just being supportive, we were being initiatory.’

Over at Defence headquarters, on Russell Hill, Australia’s military chiefs began to look at the options. As always, it was a game of anticipation—working out, before any request arrived, what might be required and what could be offered.

There was still an active deployment in East Timor, and they were keeping an eye on other potential flashpoints around the region, including the Solomon Islands and Bougainville. The Defence Force chief, Admiral Chris Barrie, and Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Peter Cosgrove, were

weighing up what they could commit that wouldn't leave them short should something unexpected arise closer to home. 'They were very keen for us to go and conduct big operations in the Malacca Straits to provide security,' Chris Barrie said. 'We said we can do a little bit there but you know we've got these other things.'

Some critics of what would eventually be a narrowly focussed commitment believed the regional hot-spot argument was an excuse not to get too involved in a conflict far away. Cosgrove insists that factoring in potential regional instability was simply common sense. 'It's like leaving something on the stove and going out,' Cosgrove explained. 'You basically ensure that you're not going to have a problem you can't handle because you did something else.'

About two weeks after the attacks, Admiral Barrie went to Washington to meet the new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but he would also have talks on Australia's possible commitment in Afghanistan and how it might fit with US plans. On Barrie's plane from London to the US, a flight attendant had a panic attack. She had previously been on a hijacked flight and, though the circumstances were unrelated to September 11, flying into the US where there was such wholesale fear of terrorism brought back her own anxiety. Even without the past personal experience, ordinary fliers in and out of the US in those first weeks were nervous. On the Qantas flight I took home from New York five days after the attacks, the anxiety was palpable. It wasn't until we left US airspace that the normal murmur of conversation was audible in the cabin.

On that London flight, Admiral Barrie and one of his staff had to help calm the flight attendant so she could do her job. It made the Defence Force chief think about how widespread the impact of such a large-scale incident might be. The US cities he visited on that trip were quiet, the airports nearly deserted. 'America was very traumatised,' he said. It was a message he would take later to Jakarta, to persuade his Indonesian counterparts to set aside any frustration with the way Americans sometimes approached things and 'lend a helping hand'.

*

The Australian government was willing—even eager—to join the Afghan operation for many reasons. Howard and his ministers saw it partly in alliance terms: as an obligation to the United States which had to be fulfilled. In that vein, Australia looked out for opportunities to help whenever the US needed it. Australia might need a big and powerful friend in its own region again one day and members of the government believed it was good to have some credit in the bank. But they also saw it as directly related to Australia's own security. If the US could be attacked at its heart, so could smaller countries with similar cultures and values.

There were differing views within the defence and security establishment as to whether the initial contribution should be lean, sharp and swift, or more substantial and longer lasting. The Prime Minister was in the former camp.

As the US plans for Afghanistan took shape, John Howard firmed in his view that Australia's mission should be deliberately specific: to go in and help demolish al Qaeda, dismantle the Taliban government which was supporting it, and then get out. Howard was adamant he didn't want to be embroiled in longer-term fighting, reconstruction or any messy 'nation-building'. He wanted a surgical operation with a finite duration. 'I was conscious given the potential for difficulties in our own part of the world, that the right combination was to provide sharp-edged forces for a limited period of time during the hot part but not get bogged down in long, drawn out peacekeeping operation,' Howard said. That was also the advice of the defence chiefs, 'And I thought that was an eminently commonsense approach.'

But before his prime-ministership was out, that approach would change dramatically. Howard would withdraw the forces a year later on the widespread but mistaken belief that the allies' triumph over the Taliban would be permanent, only to send them back again in 2005. Alongside the

United States, Britain and other nations, Australia would find itself embroiled in Afghanistan well beyond the end of the decade.

*

The shape and speed of Australia's 2001 deployment to Afghanistan—and the pre-deployment to Iraq just over a year later—was partly influenced by events several years before. In 1997, Iraq's President, Saddam Hussein, had refused to cooperate with the United Nations over weapons inspections, and a no-fly zone had been imposed on his country, banning his aircraft from their own airspace. When he threatened to breach it and shoot down US spy planes, the then US President, Bill Clinton, assembled a 35,000-strong multinational force in Kuwait, and was poised to launch air strikes. Australia sent a detachment of the Special Air Service as part of the American Operation Desert Thunder, under the Australian banner of Operation Pollard.

The military confrontation was initially averted and by mid-year Saddam had acceded to the demands of the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM). After three months on stand-by in Kuwait, Australia's forces came home. But the Iraqi resistance to inspections re-emerged and in November, Clinton resurrected the operation. The following month, the re-named Operation Desert Fox began with air strikes on Iraqi weapons facilities. Four days of combat operations, ending on the first day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, persuaded Saddam to comply.

Having waited for months, Australia wasn't part of it when the bombardment finally happened, because there was too little time for Special Forces to re-deploy. After that, Defence and the government gave more consideration to ensuring Australia had the capacity to deploy quickly, when necessary, across the world.

*

On his return from his Washington trip, Admiral Barrie briefed Defence Minister Peter Reith on his discussions. ‘The US seems to be in a quandary about their coalition allies,’ Reith recorded later, in a diary note. ‘They’ve got Australia in the top drawer as a military contributor, along with the UK and maybe Canada.’

The public perception was that the US was dragging its allies in from everywhere. But it wasn’t like that at all. ‘The Aussies, the French, the Canadians, the Germans want to help,’ US National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice told a meeting of Bush’s most senior security and military advisers on 30 September 2001, according to journalist Bob Woodward’s account in *Bush at War*.

But even within the US administration itself, there were differing views on how they should fight the war and who should be invited to come along. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was reportedly reluctant to form a big and potentially unwieldy coalition. At the Pentagon, they wanted the US to handle things alone.

It was the same back in the first Gulf War. As the 41st US president, George Herbert Walker Bush, assembled a coalition of some 100 nations for his 1990 assault on Iraq, the Defense Secretary, Dick Cheney, was similarly inclined not to complicate things by calling in friends. Richard Clarke, then Assistant Secretary of State for Political and Military Affairs, records in his memoir, *Against All Enemies*, that when he told Cheney Australia had decided to send F-111 aircraft as part of the allied force, the exasperated Defense Secretary threw up his hands. ‘Dick, we do not have room for any more allies. Stop asking them.’

But in 2001, the second President Bush—often known simply by his presidential number, 43, to distinguish him from his father—wanted a coalition. So Rumsfeld acknowledged Australia’s offer and told Rice and others at the 30 September meeting that he would include Australia ‘if we can’.

Because ANZUS had been invoked, the Australian government didn’t believe it needed a formal US request to commit troops. But mindful of

process, Howard still wanted one. Having followed his instincts in Washington, he was now following them again and deferring to his more cautious side.

The Prime Minister was about to call an election. He wanted to be able to say to the Australian people—whose votes he would soon be chasing—that their soldiers were going off to fight in Afghanistan in Australia's future security interests, and because its alliance partner, the US, had asked for help. 'I suppose it's the old solicitor's training,' Howard said. 'I always wanted a paper trail.'

History might also look harshly upon someone who went before being asked. On 29 April 1965, the prime minister, Sir Robert Menzies, announced he was committing Australian forces to fight in Vietnam—without a request. Menzies was determined to keep the US engaged in the region and uphold the alliance. In Parliament, he flourished a letter from President Lyndon Johnson. 'I never publish a letter without having the full authority to make it public,' he declared at the time.

The letter expressed delight at Australia's decision to commit an infantry battalion 'at the request of the Government of South Vietnam', which Menzies said he had received. The Johnson letter also gave the impression there had been a US request. In fact, Menzies had neither. There had been no request from the US at all, and from the South Vietnamese, only assurances that one was coming. It never did.

In 2001, Howard wanted, at the very least, a presidential phone call. Australia's ambassador to the US, Michael Thawley, was charged with conveying the request. Thawley and Howard were close. To the sometime frustration of other senior officials, Thawley was able to go straight to the Prime Minister with issues of concern and, likewise, would regularly receive assignments directly from him. Sometimes his superiors in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade felt a little dealt out.

But this request caused a problem for the Americans. The White House preferred not to issue a formal request because of the precedent it could set among America's friends. Word came back from Washington that Bush

didn’t want to call. If he did that for Howard, it might raise expectations elsewhere. Reith recorded the reasoning in his diary note: ‘They don’t want to request our military forces because then others in the coalition will also want requests that the US doesn’t want to make. But they don’t want to have to say so.’

To be blunt, and American officials usually aren’t, the US administration took the view that some of its friends would make a bigger contribution by staying home. It saw some countries’ military forces as too incompatible with its own. The hardware didn’t always match, training and discipline were sometimes dissimilar and language differences could complicate things. On top of that, some countries placed caveats on where their service personnel could go and what they could do. In the US view, that made relying on them problematic at best and, at worst, dangerous.

Australia would apply similar tests, four years later, before agreeing to partner with the Dutch on what would become its second pass in Afghanistan. But for now, it was the US being choosy. Australia had very few caveats and that made it attractive. As Peter Reith observed:

> If you’re going into battle with the Americans, they want people that they really get along with. Forget about diplomacy or policy or anything else. When it comes to an operational matter and their guys are at risk, they’re just not going to have anybody but people that they’re satisfied are absolutely up to scratch.

Like Cheney back in 1990, Rumsfeld had to abandon his solo inclinations. The White House wanted the help. Bush was prepared to accede to Howard’s request but wanted his administration to take steps to avoid offending others. In the end, the White House had the State Department broadcast a generic invitation to allies. It was adequate cover.

On Friday night, 28 September, the Prime Minister’s phone call came. He was halfway through a Liberal Party fundraising dinner at Le Montage restaurant in the inner-western Sydney suburb of Leichhardt, when Bush

rang, pre-arranged, at 9.35 pm. The two men briefly discussed the September 11 attacks, the upcoming APEC summit in Shanghai which both were due to attend, and the military plans for Afghanistan.

Bush didn't feel the need to spell out the request formally on the phone. Instead, he simply said: 'John, our two militaries are talking. We'll leave it to them.' That was enough for Howard. On a matter as weighty as war, he had insisted on heads-of-government contact and he'd got it.

*

As John Howard was taking his call from Washington, Alexander Downer was representing him at a memorial service in New York. There had already been a commemorative church service in Canberra, attended by Governor-General Peter Hollingworth, and a condolence debate in Parliament. But this was a special memorial service to mourn the eleven Australians and two New Zealanders who had died in the September 11 attacks, near where they occurred.

Emotion was still raw and passion high. Downer told the crowd:

> I am certain that those who are lost to us would want us to repair the assault on our innocence, to restore our sense of security and to renew our rights and freedoms. They would ask that we hold no grudge against any particular ethnic group, any race, any creed or colour or religion as a result of their deaths. They would ask that we not seek needless revenge or retribution but instead work with patience, resolve and wisdom.

The Foreign Minister declared they would also want justice. And across town, around a large table at United Nations headquarters, that is what the United States said it was seeking. A Security Council resolution the day after the attacks had already endorsed nations working to identify the

‘perpetrators, organisers and sponsors’ and hold them accountable. It also recognised ‘the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence’.

On 28 September, the Security Council went further. Resolution 1373 laid out steps to curtail terrorist financing and foster the exchange of information to prevent further terrorist acts. And it recognised the right of UN member countries to combat ‘by all means’ the threats to international security which terrorism posed.

It wasn’t specific UN backing for direct military action in Afghanistan. But the US took it as a mandate, and so did its ally, Australia.

*

The attacks on the US were having far-reaching implications in Australia, beyond the preparations to join a retaliatory force in Afghanistan. In a huge hurry, the government’s defence and security agencies began examining how they were placed to respond should such a thing happen at home. The answer was, not well.

The previous year, Australia had staged the Olympic Games in Sydney. It had involved a massive security operation and planning for a raft of bad scenarios. As a result, the west-coast-based Tactical Assault Group (TAG), then within the Special Air Service Regiment, had moved over to the east coast for the duration of the games. They had also raised a special, temporary Incident Response Regiment in case of any chemical or biological attacks during such a high-profile event.

When the attacks occurred in the United States, Australia’s defence and security agencies decided they needed to be permanently equipped to cope with a major incident in one of the cities in the east of Australia. The response regiment was raised permanently and a new TAG was established in the east, to mirror the one in the west.

Given the breadth of special operations capability, a new Special Operations Command was also set up at Sydney’s Garden Island. The then Brigadier Duncan Lewis—in 2011 the federal government’s national

security adviser—was its first commander. ‘The actions that took place in the military immediately after that were just dramatic and there was kind of a breathless pace … Over the ensuing weeks we moved like greased lightning to get the equipment and the people,’ Lewis said.

There were concerns about everyday security too. The Defence Department had immediately upgraded security at all of its facilities Australia-wide after the attacks and Admiral Barrie had written to defence families, urging them to take care with their own personal security.

But some of the big national buildings—including Parliament House—had no visible extra protection. Barrie and departmental secretary Allan Hawke went to see the head of the Prime Minister’s Department to point out the inconsistency and security was upgraded.

The defence chiefs back in Canberra were working on the shape of Australia’s likely offshore deployment. But first, there were practical problems to be ironed out. Under its force structure, the US military carved the world into sectors and appointed a separate chief to oversee operations in each. Australia fell under the Honolulu-based Pacific Command and its Commander in Chief, known as CINCPAC, was Australia’s main point of contact. But, as the planned US retaliation for the September 11 attacks would target Afghanistan, that was about to change. CINCPAC’s area of responsibility only stretched as far west as Pakistan, so the operation would be designed and run out of US Central Command, or CENTCOM, as it had been for the first Gulf War.

CENTCOM was based at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, and allies joining the show would have to send representatives there, pronto. Soon the car park surrounding CENTCOM’s headquarters would be jammed with demountable buildings as the coalition sprang up for what the Americans would call Operation Enduring Freedom. In what was dubbed the ‘trailer park’, Australia set up camp among the offices of 52 nations. The operational names for Australia’s military commitments are automatically generated by random word selection, and this one was given the moniker Operation Slipper.

In early October, the defence chiefs appointed Brigadier Ken Gillespie as its national contingent commander. The father of a young daughter, Gillespie was just finishing a significant leave break having returned in mid-July from a year heading a brigade in East Timor.

The family was moving from Sydney back to Canberra, where Gillespie was looking forward to finishing the home renovation he had started on their Canberra house. As travelling parents are often pressed to do, he promised daughter, Moira, that he would now be home for a while.

The returned brigadier was two weeks into his new job as Director-General Preparedness and Plans at Army headquarters when the September 11 attacks occurred. Soon after, Cosgrove called him in with the new assignment: to set up at CENTCOM, build relationships and ‘work it’ to get Australia involved in the US-led operation.

When he broke the news at home that night, Moira fixed her dad with an unimpressed look. ‘Doesn’t General Cosgrove know you’ve got a six-year-old daughter?’ she asked. Gillespie and his wife, Carmel, were surprised she even knew who Cosgrove was. When the former army chief heard the story some years later, he confessed to the girl that, no, he had not been aware of her at the time. He was now.

Within three days, Ken Gillespie was packing for Florida, via Washington DC. He wanted to work with people he knew so he roped in two colleagues he knew well from Timor: Roger Noble, who had served as his brigade major, and Derek White, who had installed the information systems. He also called Andrew Nikolic, the Commanding Officer of the Parachute Training School based at Nowra on the New South Wales south coast.

‘I want you to be my chief of staff,’ Gillespie told Nikolic. Little more than 24 hours later, Nikolic was on his way to Sydney, where Headquarters Australian Theatre was then based. It would be his job to organise the people and equipment and write the standard operating procedures for a new national headquarters, to be established in the Middle East. The two men had the briefest of consultations as Gillespie swung through, en route

to the airport. ‘I said, this is what I’m planning to do,’ Nikolic recalled. ‘He said, sounds like a plan. See ya, mate. Let me know how it’s going when I get to Tampa.’

Gillespie was aware that this was not like other deployments. Normally, he left knowing that, while he might be facing danger, his family at home was safe. In what was being called a ‘war on terror’—which might erupt anywhere—he didn’t know what could happen while he was away. Gillespie flew out on 12 October . He sat on the plane with his head full of questions. *What does this mean for my family? What is this war? How is this going to go?* He was conscious he’d left his wife with a mighty mess at their home in Canberra. *How is Carmel going to fix all the renovation damage I’ve done?*

And there was one more. *How the hell am I going to do this?* Gillespie was used to being deployed with orders in hand. Here, he would have to make it up as he went along. ‘It wasn’t like a normal military operation where you go knowing what the mission is specifically, what you’re going to have, what your limitations are,’ Gillespie said. ‘It was into the unknown in that regard.’

With the diplomatic arrangements in place and military planning well underway, the government turned to the cold, hard realities. Like almost every administration dispatching its citizens to war, it was anxious about casualties. ‘There was definitely a discussion about risk because that was more the issue than anything else,’ Peter Reith said.

As is usual in preparing for an operation, the ADF prepared a kind of actuarial study, based on all the known risks, of the likely number of Australian deaths. Peter Cosgrove acknowledged its sensitivity: ‘There was a number,’ he said. ‘It’s a classified number which I’ll never reveal because it’s quite distressing to the loved ones of soldiers to say the actuaries have been on the job to work out how many we’re going to lose.’

*

The government formally endorsed the Australian deployment on Tuesday, 2 October, at what would be the last Cabinet meeting before the election. Treasurer Peter Costello gave a briefing on the economy, warning that a serious downturn was likely. Despite Costello's economic concerns, the looming war—albeit, they hoped, a short one—and a raft of sticky issues which the government still had to manage, there was a sense of optimism in the room. There had been a remarkable turnaround in the Coalition's dire position of a few months earlier, and ministers emerged from the Sydney meeting feeling that the government was in good shape.

On 4 October, the Prime Minister announced the military commitment to Afghanistan. 'When President Bush and I spoke last Friday evening, we agreed the nature of any Australian involvement would be discussed by the leaders of our respective defence forces,' Howard said. He described plans to send a detachment of soldiers from the elite Special Air Service Regiment and an air-to-air refuelling aircraft. 'We've already committed to an extension of the presence of HMAS *ANZAC* which is currently serving with the US Fifth Fleet in the Persian Gulf,' Howard said. 'We also stand ready to consider further contributions such as long-range surveillance aircraft and an amphibious command capability.' He assured Australians the deployment was 'very much within Australia's capability'.

Although some in the government and the military thought privately that Australia should be committed to doing more in Afghanistan, publicly there was no significant dissent, including from the Opposition. This was a bipartisan commitment and would remain so through the withdrawal of troops a year later, the re-deployment in 2005 and the change of government to the end of the decade.

Shortly before the 4 October announcement, Howard phoned Opposition Leader Kim Beazley. CDF Admiral Chris Barrie and Reith's chief of staff, Peter Hendy, then briefed Beazley. The Labor leader described the commitment as 'modest'. He was concerned that the government wasn't sending helicopters for airlift support, but he did not air his concerns publicly. His questions focussed on the SAS and the Boeing 707 air-to-air

refuellers. Officials were prepared to outline the total numbers—some 1000 personnel over all—but to Reith's surprise, Beazley never asked.

At the news conference which followed, in the Prime Minister's courtyard, John Howard also announced he'd spent three-quarters of an hour the previous day reading an intelligence dossier—compiled by British intelligence—which US ambassador Tom Schieffer had shown him. 'Collectively, it amounted to a very compelling case in support of the allegations concerning bin Laden and his terrorist organisation,' Howard said.

The 62-year-old Howard was asked at his news conference about his own future, having flagged a year earlier that he might consider retiring when he reached age sixty-four. 'Quite frankly, the last thing I want to do at present is leave government, because my overwhelming commitment is to see the Australian people through this new and very dangerous security and economic challenge.'

He was setting the scene for the coming election, and those of us gathered in the Prime Minister's courtyard knew it was imminent. When a journalist asked if he would be calling it that afternoon, he said 'No'. He went to Government House the next day and took Australia to the polls.

*

While Howard and Beazley were campaigning in the shadow of a looming war, Ken Gillespie began work in Tampa on integrating Australia's still-not-finalised contribution into the overall US operation, and Andrew Nikolic pulled things together in Sydney.

But there was another matter still being resolved. It was hardly feasible for an operation in the Middle East to be headquartered out of Potts Point. Where would they be based? Australia had to find somewhere, not too far from Afghanistan, to act as a staging post.

But Australian governments had not done enough work on their relationships in the Middle East to make this an easy task. It had been many

years since there had been an operation this far from its own shores, and although recent tasks in places like East Timor had helped highlight and address some logistical shortcomings, diplomatically Australia found itself unprepared.

Michael Thawley, then ambassador to Washington, recalled it was a significant, unanticipated problem. ‘Here we are: the Americans want you there, we want to be there, but you can’t find any places to put the troops.’

The Defence Force began making inquiries. In October 2001, the head of Australia’s Strategic Command, soon-to-be Chief of Air Force and eventually Chief of the Defence Force, Angus Houston, was dispatched on a diplomatic blitz of potential host countries. Houston had strong relationships in the Middle East from his time at the British Royal College of Defence Studies in Britain, although not, as it turned out, in the countries where he needed them most. He did a lot of knocking on doors. In Oman, things were looking good. But the Omanis were taking their time considering Australia’s request. Houston recalled:

> It all seemed to be coming along reasonably well but we weren’t getting the final approval … It was still hanging. We didn’t know if we were going to get it. We were hopeful, but with the Government having made an announcement, it was important that there was certainty there. So I took it upon myself to go to Kuwait to have a back-up.

Initially, the US wasn’t in much of a position to help. According to Thawley, ‘The Pentagon hadn’t been planning on involving other people so they weren’t focussed on what they would need to do to support allies in that sort of context.’

The Americans would be based in Kuwait, a country with which it had strong ties in the wake of the Gulf War and from where it would be running this one, through US Third Army. Houston hoped there might be some goodwill stored there from Australia’s participation too. With Oman

headquarters still undecided, Houston caught a plane up the Gulf. The Kuwaiti welcome was remarkable. They well remembered 1991. Yes, they told him, if you want to base your Special Forces here, it's the least we can do. 'They were very gracious,' Houston said. He negotiated a status-of-forces agreement to formalise arrangements for basing Australia's forces in Kuwait and the deal was done. (Ahead of the Iraq War, the US would shift its headquarters to Qatar and Australia would follow, eventually moving to a base outside Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.)

The Defence Force had decided early that sending Special Forces was 'a no brainer' and an initial task group was dispatched to Kuwait, pending further instructions. As the SAS prepared to deploy, their superiors warned that this would not be like other recent missions—and not only because it was further afield. 'I actually thought the belligerence and the innate skill at arms or deadly nature of your average Afghan warrior, whether he was Taliban or al Qaeda, was of a different quantum to what our lads had seen in East Timor,' Cosgrove said.

And that's what the army chief would tell the soldiers in his pre-deployment address at Perth's Campbell Barracks. They got the message. 'I believe they were imbued with a sense of "game on".'

*

The five-week election campaign was framed around issues the government linked back to security: the terrorist attacks in the United States; and immigration policy, newly badged as 'border protection', thanks to the government's repelling of the MV *Tampa* and its cargo of rescued asylum seekers.

It was a hugely volatile period in Australian politics on the twin issues of immigration and security. The election atmosphere increased political pressure on the Defence Force, with what became known as the 'children overboard' affair emerging just two days into the campaign.

Another boat, subsequently named Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel (SIEV) X, also sank en route from Indonesia and more than 300 asylum seekers drowned. The sinking further inflamed the debate, with those for and against the government's policies accusing each other of having the deaths on their conscience.

A few days before, on Friday, 19 October, Howard made a quick trip to Shanghai for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders' meeting. It was the first meeting of world leaders since September 11.

Howard took a chartered Ansett jet—there were plenty sitting idle—with twenty or so fare-paying media people rattling around down the back. It was a strange flight: they gave us aeroplane pyjamas and we joked that we resembled some Heaven's Gate-style New Age cult as we stretched out across the expanse of empty seats in our identical sweat pants, off to China for the weekend.

Although it was the first opportunity for John Howard to speak with George W. Bush in person since the attacks five weeks earlier, it was another leader who would capture attention. The president of the world's most populous Muslim nation, Indonesia's Megawati Sukarnoputri, went to APEC having spoken out against the bombing raids that had already begun in Afghanistan. Megawati said it was wrong to attack another country 'for whatever reason', because 'Blood cannot be cleansed with blood'.

Indeed, Indonesia had not reacted with the same degree of public outrage over the September 11 attacks as had some other countries. Australian diplomats in Jakarta had been monitoring what they described as a growing 'Islamisation' of politics in Indonesia, and the talk of retaliatory action against Afghanistan had solicited a strong response. There was speculation about the possibility of large public demonstrations condemning the United States and its allies, and security was reinforced around the Australian embassy, just in case. The rallies never eventuated but the president gave voice to a current of concern.

At APEC, President Bush succeeded in having the final communiqué condemn the September 11 attacks and endorse an international effort to

combat terrorism. In order to secure the support of Indonesia and the two other Muslim member countries, Malaysia and Brunei, it did not specifically mention Afghanistan.

*

On 22 October—the day after APEC ended—Defence Minister Peter Reith and Opposition Leader Kim Beazley farewelled an advance party of SAS in Perth. Three days later, with the election campaign at its peak, Howard announced the deployment of other army, navy and air force assets. Elements of the 16th Air Defence Regiment were farewelled in Adelaide that same day, and F/A-18 Hornets from RAAF Base Williamtown a week later—the day before voters went to the polls.

These were Reith's final ceremonial duties as Defence Minister as he retired from politics following Howard's controversial election victory on 10 November. Among the papers he packed away was something his American counterpart, Donald Rumsfeld, had sent him. It was a copy of *Rumsfeld's Rules*, a list of mostly light-hearted pieces of advice for anyone working in the White House and other senior echelons of the Washington bureaucracy, which he had produced (and later copyrighted) as chief of staff to President Gerald Ford in 1974. In light of the conflict just beginning, Rule number 12 particularly stands out. 'It's easier to get into something than to get out of it.'

4

ON THE GROUND

WHEN THE SOLDIERS OF Australia's Special Air Service Regiment landed in Afghanistan, one thing struck them above all else: the cold. It was bitterly, bone-shakingly cold—much colder than any climate they had ever worked in before—and it was just December, the beginning of winter, when even insurgents seek refuge from the elements.

Temperatures in the southern provinces were plunging, and over the coming months, they would fall far lower than these men had experienced in their operational lifetimes. The Australians had prepared for the extreme temperatures as much as possible—helped by the experience they and their colleagues had brought home from various exchange programs, embedded and deployed with regiments abroad—but the reality of an Afghan winter was something else.

Two soldiers from that first deployment recalled how physically challenging they found it. 'As you go further up into the hills it's colder again,' one said. 'Certain areas are colder than others but then you got right into the full guts of winter, that's when all these other things [started happening].' They learned to cradle water bottles in their sleeping bags, so their contents would still be liquid when they woke.

As temperatures sank to a good distance below zero, the fuel lines in their long-range patrol vehicles froze, so they had to think laterally to find a way to get a stalled six-wheeled modified Land Rover moving. 'We were stuck. We couldn't move anywhere,' the soldier explained. 'So we came up with an alternative,' his colleague continued. 'Bang. It worked.' They ran it on jet fuel. It was a risky solution, and not a permanent one: jet fuel has a lower freezing point than petrol but it causes deterioration in engines not made for it. Still, it got them out of trouble.

The Special Forces travel light. They don’t carry heavy coats, or have tonnes of equipment to set up a well-insulated camp against the aching march of frost into the bones. They move swiftly, sometimes on motorcycles or on foot, and often sleep out. They are well trained and well prepared, physically and mentally tough and resourceful. They depend on what they have and what they know, and make adjustments where they are able. After that, they make do.

On this deployment, though, they wanted changes to their equipment. Not long after they landed, the SAS task force asked to have their uniforms modified. The hip pockets were enlarged to fit their insulated gloves, and new, smaller pockets were added to their shoulders, so smaller items could be reached more easily.

They also asked that the pattern on their desert ‘cams’—camouflage—be redesigned to better reflect the terrain. The disrupted green pattern had taken ten years to perfect, or so Australia’s defence scientists thought. When the request came for an overhaul, the scientists asked for digital photographs of the landscape so they could work out how to make the soldiers blend in. When they came up with a solution, they sent it across to the SAS’ headquarters at Perth’s Campbell Barracks. The base colour of the new pattern was pink. The blokes took one look at it and the response was swift: ‘We’re not wearing that.’ An alternative was offered—in lavender. The scientists received the same emphatic response. The elite soldiers of the Australian Defence Force considered this an affront to their masculinity. Not even a situation of life and death would make them dress in that part of the colour spectrum. A third option in fawn and brown was accepted and the matter was settled.

*

In some other corners of the army, there’s a bit of eye rolling about the Special Forces—a degree of resentment that they get the good jobs and the

glory, and a feeling that they are prone to considering themselves a tiny bit superior.

In the first Afghan deployment, it was all about the Special Forces. Regiments from the regular army weren't being deployed. The Australian SAS were among the first international personnel into Afghanistan on the post-September 11 operation, after the United States and Britain. Deployed on Operation Slipper, they were also part of the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom.

The coalition forces began their operations in three stages. Within a fortnight of the September 11 attacks, a team of CIA paramilitary operatives, codenamed Jawbreaker, quietly entered Afghanistan across its northern border with Tajikistan and moved south-east. By 26 September they had reached the Northern Alliance stronghold in the Panjshir Valley, towards the border with Pakistan, and joined up with them and other opponents of both the Taliban and al Qaeda.

On the night of 7 October, local time—before Ken Gillespie and his Australian team even knew they were going to Tampa—the air war began. US aircraft flew 4600 kilometres each way from the Indian Ocean military outpost of Diego Garcia to bomb Taliban military targets, including communications, training camps, armoured vehicles and troop movements. Less than half an hour after the bombing raids started—lunchtime in Washington—President Bush announced them in a national address from the White House Treaty Room.

> These carefully targeted actions are designed to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations, and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime. We are joined in this operation by our staunch friend, Great Britain. Other close friends, including Canada, Australia, Germany and France, have pledged forces as the operation unfolds.

He said that as a friend of Afghanistan, America would drop food, medicine and supplies to its ‘starving and suffering men and women and children’. America was a friend of the one billion practising Muslims worldwide, but not of any nation which harboured those who sought to undermine ‘our precious freedoms’, he said, warning that: ‘Every nation has a choice to make. In this conflict, there is no neutral ground. If any government sponsors the outlaws and killers of innocents, they have become outlaws and murderers, themselves. And they will take that lonely path at their own peril.’

The same day, the al Jazeera television network broadcast a message from Osama bin Laden.

> Here is America struck by God Almighty in one of its vital organs, so that its greatest buildings are destroyed … Grace and gratitude to God. America has been filled with horror from north to south and east to west, and thanks be to God. What America is tasting now is only a copy of what we have tasted.

The al Qaeda leader accused the United States of hypocrisy in avenging only those atrocities committed against the West, and of committing or condoning atrocities itself, such as the atomic bombing of Japan in World War II.

> I tell them that these events have divided the world into two camps, the camp of the faithful and the camp of infidels … May God shield us and you from them. Every Muslim must rise to defend his religion. The wind of faith is blowing and the wind of change is blowing to remove evil from the Peninsula of Muhammad, peace be upon him.
>
> As to America, I say to it and its people a few words. I swear to God that America will not live in peace before peace reigns in

> Palestine and before all the army of infidels depart the land of Muhammad. Peace be upon him.

In Afghanistan, the aircraft met little resistance to their bombardment. Neither the Taliban nor al Qaeda had any significant air defence nor, at that stage, much experience with anti-aircraft guns or shoulder-mounted grenade launchers. Six years later, when I visited Afghanistan with the ADF and flew from Tarin Kowt to Kandahar in a military helicopter, I would be grateful that at least one of them was a lousy shot.

The US emphasis soon shifted to providing air support for the initially hesitant Northern Alliance ground troops. To stiffen the resolve of the local fighters, the US put small teams of Special Forces soldiers on the ground among them. Travelling on horseback and armed with laptops and other weapons, they pinpointed targets for air strikes and called them in—all in the cause of demonstrating vividly to the nervous locals that the US was protecting their backs.

The third phase involved sending in the US Marine Corps and a team of Special Forces to set up base in the south. The SAS were among them. That the Australians went in so early on such a specialised joint mission was the result of some creative manoeuvring on the part of Ken Gillespie and his team in Tampa. In the trailer park, there was plenty of politics at play. Planning HQ had a hierarchy, and those with an office inside the buildings of CENTCOM proper were at the top of the tree. For those in the sheds outside—including the Australians—the closer you were to the bricks and mortar, the higher your status.

The much-vaunted special relationship between America and Britain was well on display, and other countries were conscious of being in a different category. Ken Gillespie found the British, in particular, keen to keep it that way. His brief from home was to get Australia into the ‘war on terror’ and find it something useful to do. He knew the government was ready to make ships available and was keen to send Special Forces. He had to work out their role. But even as the real war was starting, a turf war was

underway in Tampa over who would do what. Gillespie said, ‘A couple of attempts that I’d made were headed off and I’m sure in my own mind, they were probably headed off by the Brits in that process … There was a bit of game-playing.’

The CENTCOM population had swollen from an average of 1000 people to about 3000 and, at its peak, would reach 4500. The agendas were almost as numerous: some countries were there to participate (with varying degrees of enthusiasm); some were coming to be seen; and some were coming to gather intelligence on everyone else.

But the US was holding its information close. In the weeks following September 11, there had been a series of anthrax attacks across the United States with indications that some could have been an inside job. It made the Americans very wary. Washington’s jumpiness about leaks meant much information was restricted to the sealed CENTCOM compound.

Thrust into the role of part-diplomat, Gillespie had to keep both his military and civilian masters informed, the latter through the embassy. And he had to find a way to make friends, fast. After observing for a while, he noted that much of the coordination and planning legwork in the US military was being done by officers at around lieutenant-colonel and colonel level. They were already chronically overworked, doing 20 hours a day and quickly becoming exhausted. With his own team of 15 still looking for something to do, he dispatched those at around the same rank to put themselves at the Americans’ disposal. ‘I want you to go and I want you to make yourselves useful,’ Gillespie told them. They did. The Americans gratefully accepted their offers and the Australians quickly established themselves as reliable and willing to work. Within a fortnight, the commander had Australian liaison officers all over the place and became extremely well informed. That helped him build relationships at his own level and in time, earned him—and Australia—a place within the command group.

Gillespie started to voice opinions on various proposals. As national contingent commander, his job was not only to find tasks for Australian

forces but also to assess those tasks they were given and, where necessary, ‘play the red card’—reject any which were unsuitable or fell outside Australia’s particular rules of engagement or national interests.

When the American planners wanted to form a kind of Special Forces coalition, a multinational squad to be called on in various combinations and essentially designed to demonstrate the coalition’s diversity, the Australians didn’t like the idea. Within the Special Forces community worldwide, there is a whole other hierarchy, and Australia’s SAS and commandos are considered to be ‘tier one’—among the best trained, anywhere. They didn’t want to end up working with soldiers who were less proficient or experienced, or whose countries had placed caveats on their participation under their various rules of engagement which could increase the burden on, and risk to, their partners. It was a red-card moment. Given a choice, the Australians would always rather work with the Americans.

In November, the US Marine Corps Pacific commander, Lieutenant General Earl Hailston, whose forces had been brought in from Hawaii, was preparing for a move into southern Afghanistan and he wanted company. The Marines had worked with the Australians before so Hailston ventured out to the trailer park with a request. If we go in, he asked Gillespie, would you come with us? Love to, Gillespie said. With one proviso. ‘I don’t want anybody else in the coalition to know that we’re planning on working together until the operations order is released and people see that we’re there,’ he told the Marine commander. Hailston agreed. By the time the Brits found out, the Australians were already on their way.

Ken Gillespie and his deputy back in Australia, Andrew Nikolic, were on their way, too. As the rest of the SAS squadron left Perth in late November for Afghanistan, Gillespie and Nikolic were headed for Kuwait, starting to move their teams from opposite sides of the world. They arrived on 10 December. The Australian SAS task force began their mission the week before.

*

The Marines had already deployed from ships in the Gulf of Oman. Crossing Pakistan's southern coast, they had moved up into Afghanistan and seized an airfield which became known as Forward Operating Base (FOB) Rhino, just south of Kandahar, on 25 November.

Eight days later, a five-member advance group from the SAS task force was able to go in to FOB Rhino by air. The remainder of the 100-strong task force would arrive over the following few days.

They left Kuwait at night by C-130 Hercules, landing on the dirt airstrip at 2.30 am. 'It's way out in the middle of nowhere,' the former Australian Special Operations Commander, Brigadier Duncan Lewis, said. 'It was an old opium poppy exporting airfield. The drug runners used it to fly poppies and so forth—opium—out.'

The airstrip and surrounds were covered in what they called 'bulldust', a yellow version of the very fine dust common in Australia's Northern Territory. Getting through it was like walking ankle-deep in talcum powder. The SAS task force's commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Peter 'Gus' Gilmore, led the advance group, recording observations in his notebook. There was no vegetation, he wrote. It looked like Mars.

Beside the airstrip was a small compound of Besser brick buildings which seemed to have served as a drug factory. There was also a hangar and a small mosque. Despite the Taliban having previously gone to great lengths to reduce the drug trade, coalition forces believed its proceeds were now being used to fund terrorism.

With their new base so isolated, the forces felt vulnerable. They were still unsure of the capability of those they would be fighting. 'The idea was to get our guys out sort of patrolling around the outside of this airfield to make sure that we weren't surprised,' Lewis said.

The Australian SAS task force was under the ultimate, tactical command of US Marine Corps Commander Brigadier General Jim Mattis, but they answered first to an Australian—Lieutenant Colonel Gilmore. The ADF is always keen to make the distinction that Australians are under Australian

command. ‘We have insisted on this probably ever since the time of Breaker Morant,’ Brigadier Lewis told a media briefing in December 2002.

Jim Mattis would become caught up in controversy in 2005, after giving a speech in which he said some Afghans deserved to die. ‘You go into Afghanistan, you got guys who slap women around for five years, because they didn’t wear a veil,’ Mattis told a crowd in San Diego, California. ‘You know guys like that ain’t got no manhood left anyway. So it’s a hell of a lot of fun to shoot ’em.’ The remark earned him a reprimand from then Marine Corps Commandant, Michael W. Hagee, who praised the general as a decorated soldier but suggested he ‘should have chosen his words more carefully’.

The Australians were a welcome addition at FOB Rhino. For a start, they were self-sufficient. Not every country’s contingent turned up properly equipped, but the Australians did. They had their own highly mobile vehicles—albeit with the odd fuel line problem—which proved invaluable to the Americans. ‘If we’d had to borrow vehicles I don’t think we would’ve been able to do it,’ the now Major General Gilmore, Commander of Special Operations, said in 2011.

The Australians had something else which set them apart—endurance. They needed it. Within the first few days, a sequence of supply flights came in to set up camp for what would become a few hundred people. But because resupply would not necessarily be regular, they needed to build up stores of fuel, ammunition and food, so the soldiers lived on half-rations for the first couple of weeks. For two weeks beyond that, they were restricted to one and a half litres of water each per day.

When a force is small, as is Australia’s, endurance, along with ingenuity and quality equipment, can help make up for a lack of numbers. These soldiers had skills and kit which some of their international colleagues envied. ‘If our Special Forces are to do things, we won’t be able to reach over our shoulder all the time to Uncle Sam,’ Peter Cosgrove said of the Australian Special Forces. ‘So, to have a powerful effect, our people have to be somewhat more autonomous.’ They could survive longer in the field

without resupply—sometimes up to two or three weeks—than their equivalents from other countries, including the US. And they were all equipped with lasers and night vision goggles, which help a lot if you're being shot at in the dark, even in the rugged terrain of Afghanistan where the lack of ambient night light reduced their efficiency. One American commander joked in 2002 that the Afghans must have 'invented darkness'.

The Australians' job was reconnaissance and surveillance. The reconnaissance sometimes involved interacting with the locals. 'There were guns bristling wherever they went,' Major General Gilmore recalled. The surveillance part of the job required being able to conceal themselves. But staying concealed posed a considerable challenge for unexpected reasons. Trying to observe rural village life from often hard-to-find hiding places, the soldiers regularly became a curiosity for the local goats which would sniff them out and come to take a look. And where a goat went, so followed the goatherd. Over and over the soldiers were finding their cover being blown. Word went back to Canberra: can somebody get us some goat repellent?

In what became a highly classified research project, the Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO) contracted an Australian university to work out what frightened goats. The best result? Tigers. Goats were afraid of tigers. It didn't seem to matter that tigers were no longer exactly common in Afghanistan: the scientists were confident that even a goat which had never met a tiger would know to be afraid of its scent. So the good folk from DSTO spread out across Australia (where tigers in their native habitat are also few and far between) visiting zoos everywhere to collect the big cats' excretions. It's hard to guess who enjoyed this more: the SAS, imagining scientists crawling around in tiger excrement, or the scientists, imagining the SAS having to cover themselves in it.

A spray-on repellent was duly produced. Unfortunately, though, it proved not to be a solution. The goats were so well repelled by the smell that they hightailed it away from the hidden soldiers, leading the goatherds to investigate what they were running from. So DSTO came up with

another version. They mixed an attractant—source unknown—with the repellent and tested it on a specially purchased herd of Afghan goats back in Australia. It worked. The goats stayed away without causing any fuss. The satisfied scientists then sold the goats, apparently at more than the purchase price.

As one senior Defence figure remarked years later, it's good to know that when it is knee-deep in shit, Defence can make a profit out of something.

*

Three weeks after arriving at FOB Rhino, the Australians and the US Marines moved by road and air north to Kandahar. But the way had to be cleared first.

The Northern Alliance and other groups, working together as the United Front, had already seized the northern cities of Mazar-i-Sharif and Kunduz. They then shifted some of their forces south to Kandahar and took control of that city, too. That made it less likely that the Americans and Australians would face a serious threat from a sizeable enemy force when they moved the 100 kilometres or so north from their outpost.

One of the alliance's leaders was Hamid Karzai, the man who would eventually govern the country as president. Karzai was an Afghan of the Pashtun ethnic group, who had moved to Pakistan after the 1980s Russian invasion to raise funds for the anti-communist Mujahideen. Now he was helping lead the local fighters against Taliban rule.

Before they moved north, the FOB Rhino commanders went to see Karzai. 'Mattis and Gus [Gilmore] actually flew up in a helicopter to Kandahar and they had an amazing meeting in the middle of the night,' Duncan Lewis said. The two men, along with the US Special Forces Commander, Lieutenant Colonel David Fox, and a group of soldiers, left FOB Rhino at about 11 pm by helicopter and arrived in Kandahar around midnight. They were driven into the city by pick-up truck to meet Karzai

and his men in one of Taliban leader Mullah Omar's residences. It had been battered by an air strike but its marble halls were still palatial compared with the little the men had seen so far of the rest of the country.

In a small room lit by a single lamp, they sat down on the floor with Karzai, his fellow Pashtun leader Gul Agha Sharzai and some associates, including an old warlord who had been held prisoner by the Taliban. The two groups of men were sizing each other up. They knew that from here on, they needed each other.

'I was surprised by Karzai—how well he spoke at the time,' Gilmore said. 'I wasn't expecting him to have such a good grasp of English and such a vision for his country.' Mattis outlined why they had come. The Americans and Australians needed to take over Kandahar Air Field. Karzai was supportive.

For a couple of hours, they drank black tea from small glasses and ate pistachios, engaging in lengthy small-talk and hearing stories of torture at the hands of Taliban prison guards before getting to the crucial details: how to get the coalition troops safely into Kandahar, from where they could push out to the north, east and west.

With the help of Karzai's local contacts, they drafted a plan to get the forces into Kandahar in the safest and most efficient manner. Then they flew back to FOB Rhino, landing at around 4 am as the sun was coming up.

With the way cleared diplomatically, the Americans and the allies took over the Kandahar Air Field and the nearby Tarnak Farm, a former al Qaeda training camp and home to Osama bin Laden. Almost ten years on, Duncan Lewis had a brick from the farm, souvenired by one of his soldiers, displayed on a shelf in his Canberra office.

From Kandahar, the Australian SAS task force continued its reconnaissance and surveillance work, ranging across those areas of the south which, ultimately, would become the most problematic of the war: Kandahar, Zabul, Ghazni and the Helmand Valley, later the responsibility of their counterparts from Britain and the United States.

When the Special Forces moved around, it was often in very small groups—sometimes a patrol of six or fewer. Their aim was to stay undetected and, where possible, to avoid contact with enemy forces. They gathered intelligence on the local people, their culture and the landscape. Were there unmarked land mines, left over from earlier times? Was the country heavily vegetated or dry? What kinds of vehicles could it take? Detailed, contemporary maps were scarce as was any real knowledge of the enemy—the shadowy insurgents linked to the al Qaeda network, moved within a population whose lineage crossed national borders and who frequently disregarded them.

The locals were gathering information too. They didn't know much about Australians. 'They just see us—they don't know who we are or what we're doing,' one soldier told me. 'They want to know. They're doing their own intelligence gathering as a community or as a person, saying who are these people? What are they doing here?' And so there were conversations, introductions, reassurances—and many cups of tea. Nevertheless, another soldier recalled 'the occasional pot-shot at us'. The Australians found a strange, landlocked country, ravaged by centuries of invasion, its citizens hardened to threats from nature and neighbouring villages and suspicious of strangers. Afghanistan's resource base was limited. There weren't vast forests or pastures to defend but wide, bare valleys and jagged mountains of sheer rock. The most prominent cash crop, the opium poppy, had been successfully outlawed under Taliban rule. But through the course of the war, the Taliban's strong anti-drugs stance would be eroded and the poppy would become an economic weapon of war.

The evidence of past conflicts was everywhere. The Australians were struck by the way old military hardware had been abandoned and the damage caused by serial battles left, in many cases, unrepaired. In the soldiers' view, it seemed to say something about these people that they did not want to make things new again. But some also suspected there was a message to any future visitors with warfare in mind—that these people had seen it all before.

Afghanistan was a country where official law enforcement was scarce, and justice was meted out at the household level against whomever was deemed to have done wrong. Protection was personal and grudges borne down the generations. The centuries-old ethics code of the Pashtun tribes of the southern region, the *Pashtunwali*, guaranteed hospitality to guests but death to strangers, so it was a good idea to have yourself placed in the first category. It is the same code which ensured safe passage to Osama bin Laden.

Unlike in Iraq, where the soldiers would find themselves fighting just a year later, here they faced an enemy without a uniform. Most local men had some kind of firearm—often an AK47 assault rifle—and identifying who was on what side was not easy. ‘If they’re robbed they don’t have coppers who come and help them out,’ Andrew Nikolic explained. ‘So it’s a different mindset. And you understand that when you do your job properly, when you engage the local population, that becomes a net positive in terms of force protection.’

The soldiers’ mission was a day-to-day proposition, separate from but related to the goals of the whole international operation—what they referred to as the ‘higher intent’. They focussed on their small part, reporting back everything they learned. As a task was completed, the mission would change, and so it went for six months until they went home and the next group replaced them.

*

In those early months, the soldiers had only minimal contact with home. They counted a total of about 20 minutes each in phone calls in six months. Some of them thought that it was probably better that way; families back home get used to long periods of no contact and for them, no news is good news.

After three months in Afghanistan, the Australians suffered two casualties in quick succession, one of them fatal. On 17 January 2002,

Corporal Tristan Salvadori was on patrol as part of an operation which uncovered and subsequently destroyed a large cache of ammunition north of Kandahar when he stood on a land mine and lost part of his foot. Almost exactly a month later, another soldier was wounded, this time fatally. Andrew Russell was a sergeant with the SAS, and he and his wife, Kylie, were based in Perth, where she worked as a nurse. In late 2001, he had accepted a posting as an instructor at the parachute school in Nowra, on the New South Wales south coast. He was to have worked for Andrew Nikolic. Before the September 11 attacks, Nikolic had been trying to help smooth the transition for the young couple by making inquiries, through his own wife who was also a nurse, at the local hospitals about future job prospects for Kylie Russell. Plans for the transfer were well advanced and scheduled for December of that year. After the terrorist attacks, Sergeant Russell was sent not to Nowra but to Afghanistan, his transfer deferred for a year. Soon afterwards, Nikolic was also dispatched, via Sydney, to the Middle East. In early February 2002, Kylie Russell gave birth in Perth to their first child, Leisa. But she would never meet her dad.

At 12.45 pm on 16 February, Andrew Russell and four colleagues were on patrol in the Helmand Valley, near the Iranian border, when their patrol vehicle hit an anti-tank mine. A US Marine Corps parachute rescue team was sent in to assist and the wounded sergeant was airlifted to Kandahar Air Base. But his injuries were not survivable and Sergeant Russell was pronounced dead later that afternoon at the US military hospital. Two days later, his colleagues carried his flag-draped coffin to a US C-130 Hercules as the pipers from Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry played in honour of a man with the distinction none could ever want—the first Australian soldier to lose his life in the Afghan conflict.

When the ADF returned to Afghanistan in 2005, they named the SAS barracks at their southern base in his honour: Camp Russell. Kylie Russell would become a campaigner for better compensation for the spouses of Australians killed in action, writing endless letters to federal ministers. Eventually, the law would be changed to improve the payments to service

widows and widowers. In October 2003, US President George W. Bush visited Australia and laid a wreath at the Australian War Memorial, praising the sacrifice of Andrew Russell. In what the government later said was an oversight, Kylie Russell was not invited to the ceremony.

After Tristan Salvadori was injured and Andrew Russell killed, as after all incidents causing injury or death, the Australian Defence Force conducted reviews of procedures. The Chief of Army, General Peter Cosgrove, ordered that the light, long-range vehicles the SAS were using should have their armour upgraded enough to improve protection, but without compromising manoeuvrability.

'You could not heavily armour the whole vehicle without losing its mobility,' Cosgrove said. 'Simply, that vehicle was not made to have armour all over it.' Still, the patrol vehicles all had their chassis reinforced. 'To make them a little more survivable.'

*

There were times when the Special Forces had to explain their actions and there were incidents which prompted disciplinary action, such as one in May 2002 in which an Australian soldier souvenired a turban from a dead Afghan after a firefight that killed nine civilians. After investigation, the soldier was disciplined and the deaths were found to be in self-defence and within the rules of engagement. One of the soldiers involved later commited suicide. At the time the original incident surfaced, defence and the government offered the soldiers involved strong public support.

The resource support for the SAS was also readily forthcoming. Several years of peacekeeping in East Timor had taught the Defence Department where the equipment and logistical gaps were. There, Australia had spent more than $1 million a day on bottled water, but initially couldn't transport it. The government had to buy bridging, water tankers, ship-to-shore pipes, small water tanks for use by units of six soldiers at a time, and medical kits. Before Timor, the Defence Force didn't have a mobile mine detector

vehicle and its armoured personnel carriers needed upgrading. But as with each incident, each operation teaches the Defence Force something, and Australia's endeavours in Timor helped set it up for the next conflict.

It also made John Howard acutely aware of the human dimension of sending Australians into harm's way. At National Security Committee meetings, the Prime Minister would routinely open with a question to senior military officers: 'How are the troops doing?'

'He was a man who felt the exquisite loneliness and agony that goes with a decision to send Australians into a dangerous situation,' John Anderson said of Howard. Others who were critical of the military commitments in Afghanistan and Iraq saw less compassion.

Howard believes all leaders who send men and women to war feel the burden of it. But despite that burden and the cost, he also believes that refusing to act decisively can sometimes make the cost higher, later. 'If you walk away from something that's difficult in the hope that it will go away, it never does go away,' he said.

There was also a lesser reason for making sure the troops were alright: Howard was also extremely mindful of the impact casualties would have on public opinion. This was a deployment with bipartisan support, but history is witness to how public support can turn. Prime ministers before him and since have been well aware of that.

5

STICKER SHOCK

WHILE THE COST OF a war will always be measured first in lives lost and wounds suffered, it's inevitably measured in dollars, too. Within three weeks of the September 11 attacks, as soldiers, sailors and pilots were preparing to deploy and a massive upgrade of domestic security was underway in Australia's airports, Treasurer Peter Costello had to figure out exactly what the price-tag would be.

Under the Charter of Budget Honesty he had introduced after the Coalition won government in 1996, Costello was legally obliged to produce a pre-election snapshot of the nation's coffers and publish it before election day. On 5 October, the day the 2001 election was called, he received the preliminary bad news from Treasury. He phoned Howard to pass it on. Changes to the parameters of social security payments, along with early estimates of the cost of the upcoming military deployment, were threatening to put the Budget in the red to the tune of $800 million. Costello was not happy.

Some uncharitable colleagues thought he should have figured that out sooner. But no war is cheap to run, let alone one with two heads: a war against insurgents offshore, and a more amorphous 'war on terrorism' at home. And it's easy to see why the unexpected scale of events made his job difficult. The following year, Costello would produce a deficit of 0.1 per cent of GDP, the only deficit Budget of his 12 years as Treasurer.

But before the Budget, came the election and the financial statement. He had to do the sums, fast. Costello recalled:

> I was totally supportive of the war and totally supportive of allocating the funding necessary for the troops. But no-one had

> any real idea of what funding would be required. I mean, you go off to war—what sort of a war was this going to be? Is this going to be a war that takes two weeks, two months, two years or was it going to be like World War I and cripple budgets?

There's a thing the Americans call 'sticker shock'—the nasty surprise which comes from seeing something you need, want or have to buy and then finding out what it actually costs. To Prime Minister John Howard, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, Defence Minister Peter Reith, and to Costello, this expenditure was essential. Any shock simply had to be overcome.

Although Costello would occasionally find himself at odds with the others over defence spending (and his relationship with Reith could not be called close), he did not disagree about the necessity or size of the commitment. But along with absorbing the shock, he also had to put the price on the sticker. 'I was in favour of supporting the engagement whatever it cost,' Costello said. 'It's just that no one had any idea what it was going to cost. I had to put out a pre-election financial statement. So I had to sit down at this point and personally put a figure on this war and then defend my estimate.'

On top of that, the September 11 attacks had prompted insurers to withdraw their cover for commercial aircraft, putting the aviation industry at risk. Governments had to step forward and offer short-term indemnity—in Australia's case, US $5 billion per aircraft, per event. The government also had to step in with temporary indemnity for the major airports and aviation service providers.

Then there was the cost of upgrading domestic security. The government had quickly decided to put 'sky marshals'—incognito security officers—on commercial airline flights and to increase the screening of passengers and luggage. 'I was finding out all sorts of things I never knew,' Costello said. 'They didn't screen suitcases that went into aeroplanes' holds!'

It was starting to add up—or, rather, not.

On 17 October, as the campaign swung through its second week, Costello and the Finance Minister John Fahey released the Pre-Election Fiscal Outlook. The document conceded the point with which the Treasurer had been wrestling—that when it came to measures to try to combat terrorism it was ‘not possible to quantify the fiscal risk associated with these measures at this stage’.

When the ministers unveiled the document at a news conference at the Commonwealth Offices in Melbourne’s Treasury Place, they met a cynical response. ‘Surely you can’t bring forward these figures with any credibility given that we’ve made this deployment to the war on terrorism and it is open ended?’ asked veteran journalist Paul Kelly, of *The Australian*.

‘Well Paul, these are the best figures that can be produced as at the present time, taking into account all revenues and all expenses,’ Costello replied. He continued:

> You can’t do a Budget on a minute-by-minute basis … Factored into this Budget—in addition to base defence expenditures—is the largest military funding build up in Australia’s peacetime history … Now if there are additional matters as time goes by, we will bring them to account. But you can’t bring those unforeseen or additional matters to account now. And I freely say to you that we haven’t tried to do that between midnight of last night and this morning.

It wasn’t the first time Costello had had his calculations bent out of shape by defence spending. Five years earlier, as the Treasurer wielded the knife in a savage first-term Budget, the Prime Minister had quarantined the Defence portfolio from the cuts. At the time, the move angered some senior officials in other departments who believed Defence got too much, too easily. Howard had put some noses seriously out of joint. ‘Oh, I’m sure I did,’ he said of the edict. ‘I was absolutely determined about that and I’m very proud that defence spending rose about 47 per cent in real terms.’

Arthur Sinodinos, Howard's chief of staff, thought subsequent events confirmed that judgment: 'A lot of that served a bit like a stitch in time.'

After September 11, Costello and new Finance Minister, Nick Minchin, became chief scrutineers of defence spending. (Fahey had retired at the election.) The Treasurer believed there simply had not been enough rigour applied to assessing the requests: 'I wasn't against giving them what was necessary but I wanted to hold them accountable for past decisions,' he said. 'Because I felt if they were never made to account for past decisions they wouldn't be careful about future decisions.'

When it came to Budget allocations for defence and security, Cabinet's Expenditure Review Committee and National Security Committee would convene together. Costello was on both committees, anyway, but the joint money meetings made for a sometimes testy relationship.

One year, the Treasurer was surprised to learn that a Budget bid the previous year for the FA-18 Super Hornets had not included funding for maintenance and parts. Now Defence was back, asking for more. As Costello recalled it, when he asked how the existing aircraft were maintained, he was told that if a part was required, a plane was grounded and the part was taken out of it, so that at any one time, there could be several planes which couldn't fly.

In the past, Defence had simply been given a global budget and had not been required to argue for and justify each individual item. Eventually, after pressing for several years, he introduced line-by-line acquittals and year-by-year justification for funding bids, instead of the lapsed-memory style accounting he felt had prevailed before.

The Treasurer sometimes found the process exasperating:

> They came up with their priority, which we funded, and the next year they were back, saying they'd changed their priorities. But we couldn't cancel the previous contract because we'd already entered into it, you see. So we'd have to enter a new one and keep the old one as well.

He once had a fraught exchange in the Expenditure Review Committee when Defence Force chief Peter Cosgrove asked for money to buy ordnance—bullets, shells and the other armaments which armies tended to need. When asked to provide figures on ordnance use, Defence was unable to complete an audit because they did not keep records.

The Treasurer exploded: 'We're worried about terrorists running around in our country and we can't find our own shells? Is that what you're telling me? We can't account for our own shells?'

Cosgrove had his own well-developed temper. He was not one to let parliamentarians bully him and regularly gave as good as he got in Senate Estimates committee hearings. It must have taken every drop of his self-control to remain silent.

*

Costello was also frustrated by the ministerial churn which he believed had undermined Defence's accountability for what had been requested in previous years and why.

As a ministerial portfolio, Defence had become a departure lounge. Under Howard, there had been three defence ministers in the five years to 2001—Ian McLachlan, John Moore and Peter Reith—and all of them had retired from politics directly from that portfolio. In the next six years there would be two more—Robert Hill and Brendan Nelson. Hill would step down from the portfolio ahead of accepting a diplomatic posting, and eventually, so would Nelson, although the latter stayed in politics after the Coalition lost the 2007 election and took an ill-fated turn at leading the Opposition first.

All of that changing of nameplates meant the Treasurer had a much longer memory than the portfolio minister:

> After 12 Budgets and 12 Expenditure Review Committees, I had a much better grip on the financing of the Defence Force than any

> general … I had been there longer than any of these guys. I watched these decisions come in. I knew the way they'd been presented, I knew they way they'd be amended, I knew the way it had blown out.

The Finance Minister, Nick Minchin, and Costello sometimes felt the claims for funding were well into the ambit zone. Howard and his succession of defence ministers tended to give the agencies whatever they wanted, something Howard himself doesn't deny. 'I don't mind who knows this,' Howard said. 'If I was satisfied it was a reasonable request. I was normally disposed to support the Defence Minister.'

Howard and Costello had similar views on security generally, and agree that it was Costello's job to scrutinise spending requests, along with Minchin. But Howard considered his job was to support them: 'That was my view and it prevailed.' He believed successive governments had exploited the morale of the Defence Force. 'I felt they had been under-funded. You couldn't ask people to fight a war without giving them adequate resources. And I thought it was disgraceful to send people into battle without the latest equipment.'

He had personally guided the development of the Defence White Paper in the year 2000, a paper which led to a significant boost in funding for new activities and acquisitions, but left some in Defence disappointed that cuts to sustainment funding dating back to the previous Labor government still had not been remedied, even with the protections of Howard's early stewardship.

The White Paper shifted from a 'defence of Australia' posture to one of 'forward response', ensuring Australian forces were ready to join conflicts which arose beyond the Asia-Pacific region. Defence boasted that it was its most comprehensive review ever and the first to involve widespread consultation. Some, however, viewed the consultation as highly selective. It came after Howard found himself on the back foot over a magazine interview in which he had endorsed a description of Australia as being

‘deputy sheriff’ to the US in the Asia-Pacific. He later suggested the characterisation was incorrect.

*

The Prime Minister’s point of reference on defence matters was, as ever, a personal one. His father, Lyall, and grandfather, Walter, had both fought on the Western Front in World War I, having joined separate battalions. Lyall Howard had kept a diary throughout his war service and it had recorded an almost unbelievable moment of chance in the middle of a bloody war—the 44-year-old father and 22-year-old son bumping into each other near the village of Clery, on the eve of the Battle of Mont St Quentin on 30 August 1918.

Eighty-two years later, in 2000, their son and grandson, as Prime Minister, made a pilgrimage of sorts to Gallipoli for the 85th anniversary of the ANZAC landings. He then travelled on to France to see where his forebears had fought. After official meetings in Paris, he spent a drizzly day on the French battlefields, first at a sombre and moving ceremony before the rows of white headstones at Villers-Bretonneux—where his Dad had spent ANZAC Day in 1918—and later visiting other sites without the media entourage in tow. He had taken with him a copy of his father’s handwritten war diary to carry on the private part of his tour. The sentimental gesture was almost spoiled when he discovered that the staff member who had been minding it throughout the morning ceremony was headed back to Paris with it still in her bag. The bus pulled over and the book was returned. For Howard, it was a very emotional day.

*

In that first Budget after September 11, the security and intelligence agencies also received a huge funding boost in line with their increased workload. There was a joke among a few senior bureaucrats that whenever

Australian Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty turned up to a National Security Committee meeting in uniform he was about to get more money. He wore his uniform a lot.

But the expanding security budget bothered Costello beyond the dollars and cents. In his book, *The Costello Memoirs*, he mused on the difficulty of working out which measures were justifiable. ‘When you are seeking to defend against an attack that can come in any place against any innocent citizen, it is hard to assess where to stop,’ he wrote.

By 2011, public concerns about personal freedom and the infringement of privacy had begun to challenge the security arguments. In the United States, airline passengers complained so bitterly about the intrusion posed by full body scans at security checkpoints that trials of modified machines were begun which replaced photographic images of a person’s body contours with a generic interpretation.

Costello has sympathy for some of the privacy concerns in the wake of the 2001 changes to security. He said:

> Budgets are not unlimited, measure cannot just be piled on top of measure. I think we should have regular reviews of the risk assessments and the costs involved, because what may well have been responsible policy in the wake of 11 September 2001 may not be still necessary in the wake of the disruption now made to the al Qaeda leadership, the destruction of the terrorist camps and the ousting of the Taliban and everything else … in 2011.

And the former Treasurer said the way risk assessments were applied across the portfolios of government was inconsistent: if governments were forced to make hard choices about what to fund in some areas, why not in others?

> You’ve got to make decisions on what is an acceptable risk and what is an acceptable price to pay for it. And I thought—and I

> think now—that you should engage in risk and cost analysis in the security area just as you engage in it in the health area, just as you engage in it in relation to road transport and injuries. You cannot suspend this inquiry in one area of government and then insist on it in others.

Costello conceded that defence and national security were the first priority in the post-2001 budgets. Throughout that election campaign and beyond, national security would come to dominate the entire political agenda. Some would accuse the government of using fear to win votes, with its devastating 11th-hour campaign slogan which summed up the sentiments of the immigration debate: 'We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.'

Arthur Sinodinos also noted the dominance of security issues. 'What I didn't realise at the time was the extent to which these issues would hijack the Government's agenda and certainly Prime Minister's time, as time went on … It chewed up a lot of time and it made the national security aspects of the job more important than ever before.'

But politics aside, those closest to the Prime Minister could see how the events in the United States had affected him and how they shaped his time in office. Sinodinos recalled how economic and social issues took a back seat, and suddenly the debate was about a war of ideas which had become real and bloody and might last generations. 'It had a marked impact on the psyche, I think, of the government and of Howard.'

It had a very direct impact on Costello and his staff, too. On a grey pre-winter day in April 2002, a package arrived in the normal mail delivery at the Treasurer's Parliament House office. When the receptionist opened it, a mustard-coloured powder fell out. She called security and that part of the building's ministerial wing was sealed off.

The anthrax scares in the US and hoaxes—thus far—in Australia had prompted special isolation and decontamination procedures. As the temperature fell into the cold Canberra afternoon, portable shower cubicles

were set up in the Prime Minister's courtyard, surrounded on all sides by windows, and the staff were paraded into them, one by one, and washed first in their clothes and then without them. They emerged dressed in borrowed gear, wet and shivering.

I remember watching this from a second-floor window above the ministerial wing and wondering if it was going to become routine. After that, all mail into the building was then security-checked and stamped accordingly. Across the federal bureaucracy, there would end up being thousands of anthrax scares, all hoaxes. Happily, the public parliamentary sheep-drenching exercise was a one-off.

On occasion, ministers and their staff stood back from the debate about terrorism and security and the US attacks and reflected that they were in office at an extraordinary time. At home during sitting weeks, over a drink or dinner, they talked about the audacity of September 11 and how the assumptions about global power had been so swiftly challenged.

It felt like everything had changed. A treasurer or a finance minister who used to worry about inflation or the cost of Medicare now also had to consider things unimaginable before. Nick Minchin, who would serve in the finance portfolio until the change of government in 2007, summed up the changed situation:

> You might've had the odd kamikaze bomber in World War II, but here we had people prepared to fly planes into the sides of buildings and blow themselves up in railway stations and bars and things. And there was a sense of how on earth are we going to deal with this?

6

THE SHORT HAUL

AS THE AFGHAN WINTER of 2001–02 neared its end, US forces were preparing to launch a new operation from a new base: an old Russian airfield known as Bagram, about seventy kilometres north of the capital, Kabul. In February 2002, after their endeavours around Kandahar, the Australian task force had moved north to Bagram Air Base to support the US Army's 10th Mountain Division, instead of the Marines.

The temperature could change quickly in Afghanistan, and spring would herald what's known as the 'fighting season', an annual increase in activity among the Taliban and al Qaeda once warmer weather made movement easier. The operation being planned for early March was designed to hit them before that occurred.

The allies had received intelligence that large groups were massing in the Shah-i-Kot valley, beneath the Arma mountain ranges of eastern Afghanistan in the Paktia province. The area was just south-west of al Qaeda's hide-out in the White Mountains of Tora Bora—translated from the Pashto language as 'black dust'. Tora Bora was a network of natural and reinforced caves that successive groups of insurgents had used as a base, possibly for centuries. The US was familiar with the caves, having helped the Mujahideen use them to fight Russian invaders in the 1980s.

In December 2001, British-led air strikes on Tora Bora had provoked a full-scale confrontation between al Qaeda and the local anti-Taliban militia who the British and Americans were supporting. Trapped al Qaeda fighters successfully negotiated a truce with the militia, pleading Muslim-to-Muslim for time to surrender their weapons. This was believed to have been a ruse to allow senior al Qaeda figures to escape across the mountains to Pakistan, including probably bin Laden himself.

Special Forces from the US, Britain and Germany then engaged in a sustained firefight with al Qaeda for more than two weeks, in what became known as the Battle of Tora Bora. The coalition lost no soldiers, seized the cave network and, although the number varies between accounts, claimed to have killed hundreds of al Qaeda fighters. But the failure to capture bin Laden or any of al Qaeda's leadership, along with suggestions that the operation was under-resourced, led to it being widely criticised as an opportunity lost.

Three months later, in March 2002, the Shah-i-Kot valley operation, to be known as Anaconda, was a chance to try again, also using Afghan forces but backed by the US and others, including part of the Australian SAS squadron. With the benefit of a month's planning and preparation this time, the allies aimed to prevent a repeat of Tora Bora by having units stationed in the mountains to the east, ready for any escape attempt. Those in the valley were named Task Force Hammer and in the mountains, Task Force Anvil. The 'hammer and anvil' technique is a slam-and-jam style operation dating back to the days of Alexander the Great, and used by Australians and Americans in the Vietnam War—with mixed results. Taliban and al Qaeda fighters would be hit from the valley side and then hit again when they tried to use the mountains to escape. The operation would rely heavily on aerial bombardment. This reflected the kind of warfare US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld favoured for the whole Afghanistan incursion: a heavy reliance on the strength of air power, with targeted ground warfare using elite specialised forces, and less emphasis on large numbers of regular troops.

But in Anaconda, regular US infantry would also be involved for the first time since they had moved into Afghanistan. On the ground, alongside the US infantry and Afghan militia, were US and British Special Forces, backed by Canadians, Germans, Norwegians, New Zealanders, Danes and Australians.

The Australians had gone into the valley in late February, ahead of the main operation, to conduct reconnaissance, and they quickly gained the

confidence of the Americans. As one officer from the 10th Mountain Division observed in Sean Naylor's book *Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda,* ' They rarely needed anything. They were pros.'

The operational area was rugged and exposed, sometimes reaching altitudes of 3500 metres above sea level on the ridges. (Australia's highest mountain, Kosciuszko, is 2228 metres.) There was snow on the ground and at night, temperatures plunged to -19 degrees Celsius. Afghans had fought and beaten the Russians twice in this valley so there was much at stake for both sides in what would become a ferocious clash. But a series of bungles would badly compromise the allies' plans.

Task Force Hammer was mostly made up of about 400 Afghan anti-Taliban militia, led by a former warlord, Zia Lodin, and two units of Special Forces, including Americans and Australians. They left the town of Gardez just after midnight on Friday, 1 March, and headed through the Shah-i-Kot valley towards their designated position, near where the al Qaeda and Taliban forces were known to be gathered.

But they had trouble on the bad roads. Some of the Afghan vehicles overturned, so their commander ordered them to turn on their headlights to help with navigation, which meant they could be easily spotted moving through the valley—not ideal for maintaining the element of surprise. When a smaller convoy, led by a US Special Forces warrant officer, split off to head for an observation point, a coalition aircraft mistook them for opponents and fired, killing the warrant officer and wounding several others.

Task Force Hammer reached its destination at about 6.15 am, and what should have been an almost hour-long aerial bombardment of the al Qaeda and Taliban positions began. But miscommunication meant that only a handful of bombs were dropped. The sparseness of the attack alarmed the Afghan fighters on the coalition side and frustrated the Special Forces. When their trucks came under sustained fire from al Qaeda mortars which, it later transpired, had been pre-set (in the army, the term is 'pre-

registered'), Afghan casualties were heavy and the task force withdrew. Their enemy had been expecting them.

At the foot of the mountains to the north and east, the first elements of Task Force Anvil were dropped in to head for their designated positions at 6.30 am. Almost as soon as they landed, they were hit with heavy mortar fire and couldn't move. The ensuing firefight continued all day.

The troops who landed to the south were hit hardest but there, the fighting began with a coalition mistake. An American section spotted a group of five men on a ridge and opened fire. Two Australians embedded with the Americans, Signalman Martin 'Jock' Wallace and Warrant Officer Clint Palmer, realised the men were waving marker panels identifying themselves as friendly. Wallace and Palmer had been embedded to ensure the Americans didn't accidentally hit an Australian SAS team which was operating close by, but this was an American patrol. Wallace and Palmer had to shout at and kick their colleagues to stop the firing. The five patrolmen survived but withdrew, leaving that part of the western ridge uncovered. Al Qaeda forces moved in.

The American unit then came under mortar fire itself in an attack which lasted 18 hours. The Australians helped drag wounded Americans into a creek bed and applied first aid, for which 32-year-old Wallace was awarded an Australian Medal for Gallantry, his nation's third highest military bravery award. Other soldiers would also receive official recognition for their service, including then Lieutenant Colonel Gus Gilmore who was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his leadership.

Anaconda reached its maximum intensity on a mountain known as Takur Ghar when two Chinook helicopters were shot down. The first was hit on descent near opposing forces and was forced to quickly abort its landing, causing an American soldier to fall out. The damaged helicopter crashed landed trying unsuccessfully to rescue him.

Another helicopter, carrying a rapid-reaction force, was sent in after the soldier but also took fire and was forced down. Six Americans were killed and others wounded. Those still able to fight defended themselves with

gunfire from inside and near the helicopter as al Qaeda operatives closed in. The Australian patrol for which their embedded colleagues had been looking out was also in the valley and able to position itself on a ridge overlooking the helicopter. They hit the Taliban and al Qaeda fighters with sniper fire and called in air strikes on the surrounding area to keep the downed helicopter from being overrun.

‘That was the most substantial firefight that the Australian army had been in since Vietnam at that stage,’ the former Special Operations Commander Duncan Lewis said. ‘It was a massive, massive operation.’ The helicopter’s occupants were eventually rescued, ending what became known as the Battle of Takur Ghar. Coalition troops moved into the valley and the opposing fighters who weren’t killed, fled.

The rest of the operation continued over several days, and SAS reinforcements flown in from Kuwait were dropped straight into the thick of it. ‘I have great admiration for those guys because they went in, they went straight to altitude,’ their National Commander Ken Gillespie said. ‘They were fighting altitude sickness all the time they were fighting the Taliban because there was no acclimatisation in that process. It was a pretty good effort.’

In total, Operation Anaconda was a 16-day mission involving some 2000 coalition troops, including about 100 Australians. On the allies’ side, 40 Afghan militia and eight Americans died, and 82 were wounded. The soldier who fell from the helicopter was captured and executed. Estimates of the number of opposing fighters killed vary from several hundred to a thousand. Critics suggested that yet again, significant enemy commanders had got away.

Lieutenant Colonel Gilmore was later awarded the US Bronze Star on behalf of his SAS task group in recognition of the Australians’ efforts. The Australians’ Kuwait-based commander remains proud of his troops. ‘To say that they didn’t win the battle, I think, is incorrect,’ Gillespie said. ‘I think they did. They didn’t win the war.’

The Bush administration noted the Australians' efforts. 'Australia has always been seen in the international community as punching above its weight,' former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage said. 'Nobody in Australia believes that when I say it.' He dismissed suggestions that Australia might suffer from an inflated sense of the importance of its contributions to US-led military endeavours in Afghanistan, Iraq and other theatres of operations.

He referred back to 1987, when Australia had been asked to send divers to help with mine clearance in the Persian Gulf as part of Operation Earnest Will in the so-called 'Tanker War' between Iran and Iraq. US-led forces were deployed to protect ships using the Gulf from attack, primarily by Iran. That year, Secretary of State George Schultz had raised the prospect of Australia joining the effort with Prime Minister Bob Hawke. A year earlier, Armitage—then Assistant Secretary in the Department of Defense—and Defence Minister Kim Beazley—nicknamed 'Bomber'—had what Beazley later described as a 'fierce argument', when he had defended Australia's capacity to work beyond its own region.

In October 1987, Armitage rang Beazley. 'You remember that conversation we had last year when you said that even though your forces were structured to defend Australia, you would still work elsewhere if your ally needed you?' Armitage asked him. 'Well, this is the call.' After initially suggesting he had little to offer, Beazley sent a team of four explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) divers, to be based on British ships.

Twenty-three years later, Armitage described the importance of the contribution as going beyond the numbers. 'The political implications of having Australia onside with us—along with the French and the Germans—was of enormous import,' Armitage said. 'Four EOD, was it going to do anything? No. We had hundreds of EOD folk. Australia had committed themselves to do dirty, hard and dangerous work alongside likeminded nations. [That was] very important to us politically.' And Afghanistan was similar: a small contribution, but valued highly in Washington.

*

The US declared Operation Anaconda a success, but faced criticism, once again, that key al Qaeda and Taliban leaders had escaped when capturing or killing them was supposed to be a priority.

It was a priority for the Australians, too. Late the previous year, as Robert Hill had taken over the Defence portfolio, the first briefing he received on Afghanistan from the Australian Defence Force had mentioned key leaders by name. Senior officers conducting the briefing on the then fledgling Australian operation used a single PowerPoint slide to give a snapshot of the various coalition operations: those which had been completed, and those which were ongoing. One of the objectives listed for the following 30 days was preventing the escape of the al Qaeda and Taliban leadership from Afghanistan. The slide specifically named Osama bin Laden by the short form ‘UBL’, and Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar.

As the tenth anniversary of the September 11 attacks approached in 2011, unconfirmed reports suggested Omar had been killed. Neither he nor bin Laden remained on the US’ most wanted list after bin Laden was killed in an extraordinary covert operation in Pakistan in May. The Federal Bureau of Investigations had been offering US $10 million for information leading to Mullah Omar’s capture. For bin Laden, it had been willing to pay US $25 million.

*

When Operation Anaconda came to an end, a series of changes were underway in the ADF. Ken Gillespie wound up his six-month stint as contingent commander and returned home, to be replaced by Brigadier Gary Bornholt. Admiral Chris Barrie was in his final months as Chief of the Defence Force, to be succeeded by soon-to-be General Peter Cosgrove. And Cosgrove’s deputy, Major General Peter Leahy, would be stepping up too as

Chief of Army. Leahy had filled in for Cosgrove regularly throughout 2001. Having returned from commanding forces in East Timor, Cosgrove had become the ADF's communicator-in-chief, receiving widespread accolades —even appearing at the 2000 Logie Awards, apparently a first for a man in khaki. Being named Australian of the Year in 2001, placed demands on Cosgrove's time, and as his understudy, Leahy filled in for him so often he was regularly ribbed as 'deputy Australian of the Year'.

The SAS squadron was moving on, too, having finished its tour. On 28 March, at Campbell Barracks, in Perth, Robert Hill farewelled those who would replace the weary soldiers. Hill felt keenly his responsibility as a minister sending young men—and later in the deployment, women—to war:

> My view was that you couldn't send troops out to fight for Australia without, in a reasonably comprehensive way, setting out why: the circumstances and what we were looking to achieve and why the decisions had been taken, the relationship with the US and all those sorts of things.

He had tried to do this in a farewell speech to the first contingent the previous November.

> I thought that's what I should say. I didn't find it a particularly easy event … In retrospect, after some years of doing it, they were probably more interested in just getting out and getting on with the job than knowing all the stuff that I was going to be saying.

As a new minister, inheriting a conflict already underway, he had had to familiarise himself quickly with the detail. In January 2002, two months into the job, he had travelled to Washington, New York, London and then on to Kuwait for meetings with the US and British governments and the

United Nations. In London, Hill outlined to journalists the state of operations:

> None of us have a time limit on it but we do think it will take some time before that job is complete. Obviously bin Laden and [Mullah] Omar are continuing to be sought and their removal would be a significant benefit, but probably not as important as the overall dismantling of the network and the reduction of the capacity to ever [again] bring the sort of havoc which was brought in September last year.

The British government was assembling an International Security Assistance Force, which would be known as ISAF, to operate around Kabul with a peacekeeping brief. When a reporter asked Hill how long he thought the force would need to be there, he replied, ‘Some people are thinking that maybe a force of some form could be there for up to two years.’

*

Robert Hill was the first Australian minister to visit Afghanistan during the conflict. But it wasn’t until May 2002, when Australian troops had already been operating there for five months.

He was almost pipped by Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock, who had planned his own trip to Afghanistan for earlier that month. The government was funding a centre for returning asylum seekers in Afghanistan, and he wanted to promote a new plan to offer cash incentives to encourage Afghans to go home. Ruddock was travelling with his departmental head, Bill Farmer. But when the pair arrived at the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, after visiting Peshawar in northern Pakistan, Farmer got word that there was defence intelligence indicating it wasn’t safe for the minister to travel on to Afghanistan, and that he might soon be hearing from Howard. The minister had planned to travel on a UN plane and he

considered sufficient precautions had been taken. But as Farmer had predicted, Howard rang. Citing security concerns, he said, ‘I don’t think you should go.’

When Ruddock said he wanted to continue, Howard suggested he consult his wife, Heather. Feeling a bit like her husband’s boss was trying to make her do the dirty work, Heather Ruddock said that as far as she was concerned, he should continue to Afghanistan.

But the Prime Minister was insistent, arguing that if something should go wrong he would be held accountable. The Defence Minister would be going in just over a week and if Ruddock came home he could go back with him—and a detachment of SAS. In the end, Ruddock agreed. But because he had a family commitment in Sydney which delayed his departure that next week by a few hours, he would follow his colleague in on a separate plane.

So Hill went on ahead, accompanied by the CDF, Admiral Chris Barrie. Theirs would become a memorable flight, involving a dramatic spiral landing to minimise the risk of being hit from the ground, and with anti-missile chaff and flares firing in all directions after the aircraft’s early warning systems wrongly detected it had been targeted.

Ruddock came slightly later. He had a sneaking suspicion that was exactly how Defence wanted it. He was right.

*

The Immigration Minister did, however, succeed in having a meeting with the man then heading what passed for a national government in Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai.

The international community had considered Karzai Afghanistan’s leader since just after the Taliban had been forced from office. In early December, the UN had hosted a meeting of 23 key (non-Taliban) Afghan leaders, including two women, in Bonn, Germany. The meeting determined that Afghanistan needed a nationally-agreed government—the previous

incumbents had taken the role by force—and appointed Hamid Karzai as interim leader. The former king of Afghanistan, Mohammed Zaher, had been interested but withdrew, apparently under US pressure.

The Bonn agreement established a transitional authority which included a commission to update the country's 1964 constitution and steps to establish a legal system and a Supreme Court. It declared that an emergency 'loya jirga'—grand council—of provincial representatives had to be held by the end of June 2002, to review the arrangements. Several weeks later, on 22 December 2001, Karzai was sworn in as chairman of the transitional authority.

A member of the Pashtun tribal and language group from the region around Kandahar, Karzai was not everybody's choice. But the Americans—and their allies—liked him. With his trademark striped green coat and Pashtun cap, Karzai was the cross-over man between his country and the West. 'People saw Hamid Karzai as a credible leader,' Arthur Sinodinos said. 'I think part of the attraction was that they could understand him. He spoke English for a start. I think people thought he could tell a good story about where he could take Afghanistan.' John Howard had a similar response: 'I thought he was impressive, urbane. He was a very articulate man.'

The loya jirga of more than 1500 representatives was eventually held on 13 June 2002, confirming Karzai and his transitional authority as an interim government until elections could be held in 2004.

The Bonn agreement had also been the genesis of the international security force, calling for its establishment to help train local soldiers and police and to stabilise the country. The aim was to hand responsibility for security back to the Afghans at an unspecified future date.

On 20 December 2001, two days before Karzai's interim government had been sworn in, the UN Security Council passed a resolution to set up both a UN assistance mission in Afghanistan and the international security assistance force, ISAF. With Britain in the lead, the founding participants included Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany,

Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden and Turkey. Canada, Jordan, Malaysia and Argentina also offered troops, but Britain decided what they were offering didn't fit initial requirements.

The leadership of the force would rotate between countries every three months. Britain wanted Australia to participate and to take an early turn at the lead. But the Howard government declined, wanting to keep its participation in Afghanistan under the banner of Operation Enduring Freedom and opting to stick with the United States and remain outside ISAF. Robert Hill explained:

> Part of taking the leader's job [was] to make a significant contribution to it … They were rotating it and it was pretty obvious they were going to run out of rotations. They ultimately did. That's why NATO took it over [in August 2003] … But in that intervening period I think our view was that on the military side, we were sufficiently engaged with what we were doing.

At the six-month mark in Australia's Afghan commitment, soon after the second rotation of Special Forces had begun their work, Hill issued a press release. 'Australia is in for the long haul,' he said. 'Part of our commitment is ensuring that our defence forces are ready to meet any new challenges that may arise. We need to rest our personnel, maintain our equipment and re-group ready for possible future operations.' But he also said that after careful consideration and consultation with the coalition forces leadership, the government had decided that 'Australia's military commitment to the coalition against terrorism will continue'.

Six months later, after there had been a third rotation of SAS, almost all of the Australians deployed to Operation Slipper would be going home.

*

Hill himself had been engaged, or rather embroiled, in a range of issues well beyond Operation Slipper. Having inherited the Defence portfolio, he also inherited the hangover from an incident during the 2001 election campaign involving another asylum seeker boat off the north-west coast. Ruddock, Reith and eventually Howard had all asserted that asylum seekers had thrown their children into the water from a foundering boat. It later transpired that senior Defence Force officers had told the government they had no evidence to support the claim.

What became known as the ‘children overboard’ affair kept the refugee issue in the headlines and the new Defence Minister busy cleaning up what had become a nasty controversy.

The refugee debate had helped carry Howard and his government through the election and back into office. Because many of the asylum seekers at the time were Afghans, the whole immigration issue had been easily framed around national security. Now, Ruddock was pressing ahead with his plans to encourage as many Afghans as possible to leave voluntarily. With victory having been effectively declared and a new interim government in place—as Ruddock had been to see for himself—the government argued that the country was stable.

Afghan asylum seekers were offered $2000 each—$10,000 per family—to abandon their claims and go home. There were strict conditions on eligibility. The government was pushing the deal, hard. ‘That is a very generous offer and one which people, I think, when they think about it, will be inclined to accept,’ Ruddock said at the time. Back from Afghanistan, he said Chairman Karzai had assured him the country was safe.

But there was some sensitivity around the subject.

As ever, Australia’s intelligence agencies were advising the government on the situation in source countries—the countries from whence asylum seekers came. One of those writing the reports was Andrew Wilkie, an analyst in the Office of National Assessments. Wilkie would attract headlines in 2003 when he resigned in protest at the looming Iraq War. He later ran unsuccessfully for Parliament as a Greens candidate, first against

John Howard in the New South Wales seat of Bennelong in 2004, and then for a Senate seat from Tasmania in 2007. In 2010, Wilkie was elected as an independent for the Federal Tasmanian House of Representatives seat of Denison.

In mid-2002, before his career change, and as the government was preparing to send asylum seekers back, Wilkie wrote a routine assessment of the situation on the ground in Afghanistan. It painted a bleak picture. In a 2006 paper he wrote for the Australia Institute, entitled ‘All Quiet in the Ranks: An Exploration of Dissent in Australia’s Security Agencies’, Wilkie revealed that his boss at ONA had disapproved of the 2002 report: ‘An intelligence assessment I prepared detailing the awful situation in Afghanistan was delayed by the head of ONA because it contradicted the government’s public assertions about a much improved situation there and the policy of returning asylum seekers.’

The report is believed to have gone up to the government about two weeks late. But in an interview in March 2011, Wilkie said it wasn’t just delayed but that he was also made to change the report’s contents.

> I think the focus of it was narrowed down … I mean, I wasn’t asked to tell a lie. I wasn’t asked to make things better than they were. But I remember the scope of the paper was somewhat reduced. I remember cutting a lot of stuff out and by omission it became a much more favourable report.

Wilkie described ONA as ‘pro-government’ and ‘pro the US’, and eventually also ‘pro the Iraq War’. ONA did not wish to respond to Wilkie’s comments. But one former ONA analyst says that contestability is central to intelligence analysis and that it is common for the content of reports to be challenged, reviewed and changed.

In 2004, the Inquiry into Australian Intelligence Agencies, headed by former Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Secretary Philip Flood, made an interesting observation about relations between government and all

the intelligence agencies: ‘The sense of accountability to ministers is deeply embedded in the culture of the intelligence agencies. There is no hint in Australia of the semi-detachment from governmental structures and lines of authority that is a feature of some intelligence systems.’

*

Whatever doubt Wilkie’s report—and others—raised about conditions for civilians in Afghanistan, militarily the allied forces were convinced they had achieved their mission. Key cities had fallen to their forces much faster and more easily than the US had expected. They had routed the fundamentalist Taliban and, they believed, smashed the al Qaeda network so that it would no longer be able to use Afghanistan as a base for launching terrorist attacks. ‘We didn’t think … that there would be attacks on third countries being planned and directed out of Afghanistan,’ Hill said. ‘We thought that problem had been fixed.’

But some international agencies were warning that many other problems were a long way from fixed. The Human Rights Watch organisation said in a report on Afghanistan in November 2002:

> Far from emerging as a stable democracy, Afghanistan remains a fractured, undemocratic collection of ‘fiefdoms’ in which warlords are free to intimidate, extort, and repress local populations, while almost completely denying basic freedoms … Afghanistan, a textbook definition of a failed state under the Taliban, now runs the risk of becoming a state that fails its people, except this time on the international community’s watch.

Nevertheless, the US and its allies considered the military operation as good as over. Its objectives had been reached. Late in 2002, and with the Special Forces’ skills no longer required, Australia began to withdraw. Almost a decade later, retired Chief of Defence Peter Cosgrove explained:

> It's sort of easy to say, 'Oh, well, nothing much else going on [elsewhere], I'll leave you there.' But when you watch the other indicators … a slimming down of the US Special Forces … and a slimming down of the UK Special Forces, why would we leave ours? … The other thing is—Australia's not running around looking for wars to stay in.

But there was talk of another war brewing, and the ADF was already running around doing contingency planning in case the government decided to join it.

*

At the political level, Australia was very satisfied with how the Afghan War had gone and Howard saw little reason to doubt the CDF's advice. 'As best you ever can with those things, I thought the advice was soundly based and that's how things appeared. And I think at that time, that was the reality of the situation.'

In June of 2002, Howard went back to Washington. Once again, the travelling media went too. Seven of us in the group of 17 had been there the previous September. It was strange to be back in the Willard, and even stranger that the hotel had put me in the same room.

Howard had returned because of unfinished business. The US had invited him to come and give the address to the joint meeting of Congress which the terrorist attacks had thwarted the previous year. It was a five-day, one-stop trip and the speech was the centrepiece, although he did also have a series of meetings, including with National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice.

In his address, Howard paid tribute to the 'strength and depth of character' of President George W. Bush, whom he called 'a great leader'. He noted that he had last been in the House on 12 September of the previous year, and that as a result of the events of the day before that,

Australians now fought alongside Americans in Afghanistan. The Prime Minister also reminded his audience that the first time the two countries' soldiers had fought together was at the Battle of Hamel in France in 1918. Australian commander General John Monash had chosen to launch the attack on 4 July, to honour the Americans.

Howard concluded his half-hour address with a pledge: 'We shall move forward, secure in the knowledge that our journey through this century—often along paths requiring sacrifice, courage and grit—will be in the constant company of a true and great friend.'

And, as friends together, within months they decided that their job in Afghanistan was effectively done. Robert Hill's 'long haul' had been shortened considerably. By the end of the year, Australia's in-country contribution to the Afghan conflict, still known as Operation Slipper, would be a single desk officer based in Kabul, followed by another man involved in mine clearance work—an echo of the old deployment of 1987.

It would stay that way for two more years.

7

GAME-CHANGER

ON A SATURDAY NIGHT in October 2002, all of the fears that Australian ministers had harboured for a year detonated on a Balinese street. Along the badly concreted footpaths of Kuta Beach on the Indonesian holiday island, any complacency that terrorism was still a long way away was obliterated in a blast of blood and debris.

The combined bombing of the Sari Club and Paddy's Pub on 12 October was the worst terrorist attack in Indonesian history. Citizens of 21 countries died—202 in all, including 38 Indonesians and 88 Australians.

Suddenly, the possibility of a direct attack on Australians was no longer theoretical. Bali wasn't exactly home, but it was close. All sorts of Australians went to Bali and could imagine that it might just as likely have been them there, that night. As the bush folk band Redgum sang in the 1980s, the prevailing thought for many was: I've been to Bali, too. Footballers on their traditional end-of-season team trips, backpackers chasing a cheap beer and groups of girlfriends on quick, inexpensive tropical holidays were all caught up in the horrific scene, when explosives packed into a car and a backpack ripped the two bars apart.

A third bomb exploded outside the US consulate, injuring one person. The coordinated attacks were believed to be the work of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), a militant Islamist group based in South-East Asia, some of whose members had links to al Qaeda. Prime Minister John Howard would later describe that night as the moment 'the last vestiges of Australian innocence were blown away'.

Howard was alerted to the bombings in the early hours of the morning. The heads of Australia's security agencies had moved quickly. The Australian Federal Police Commissioner, Mick Keelty, had already

contacted his Indonesian counterpart about helping with the investigation, and police and ASIO officers were soon on their way. The relationship the AFP and other agencies had built up with Indonesia in having to deal with the complicated asylum seeker issue the previous year ended up standing them in good stead in this crisis.

Defence Force chief Peter Cosgrove had contacted the ADF's Canberra-based command centre in the early hours to get plans underway for what was likely to be an evacuation involving military aircraft. The ADF's endeavours in the Bali response, reviewed later, would lead to a structural revamp of the force. The Incident Response Regiment set up to handle biological, chemical and radiological threats would get a new logistics component and there would be a new Special Operations Command to oversee all of the Special Forces. Security would also be upgraded on all defence bases.

Cosgrove drew the line at a proposal that ADF personnel should go to and from the bases in civilian clothes. 'If Australians perceived that the ADF was cringing from an invisible threat, we would be sending the wrong message,' he argued in his autobiography, *My Story*.

On the Sunday morning after the bombings, Howard called Australia's ambassador to Indonesia, Ric Smith. The Australian consul in Bali, Ross Tysoe, had been out on the street assisting victims soon after the bombs went off. Howard was told the picture was grim. He authorised all of the ADF's available C-130 Hercules transport aircraft to head for Bali, loaded with medical supplies and personnel. Sixty-six injured Australians were airlifted out to Australian hospitals. The Indonesian Defence Force and Indonesian airline Garuda also assisted in the airlift, as did Perth-based businessman Kerry Stokes, who loaned his Learjet to help bring in the injured.

The night after the bombings, Howard convened a meeting of senior advisers at The Lodge, in Canberra. In his memoir, *Lazarus Rising*, he described how the Director-General of ASIO, Dennis Richardson, had sought to take responsibility on behalf of the security agencies, calling the

lack of anticipation of the attack ‘by definition, a failure of intelligence’. But the Prime Minister considered that as there had been no specific warning—later confirmed by two separate examinations of Australia’s intelligence system—there was no intelligence failure.

Although Richardson seemed to be saying Australian agencies should have detected some kind of activity, Howard refused to accept his mea culpa.

*

Since the US attacks a year earlier, ASIO had been flat out. Like their equivalents abroad, the agency had been aware already of the activities, both confirmed and suspected, of various militia-type organisations around the world, including Jemaah Islamiyah and al Qaeda. But until September 11, they hadn’t exactly occupied the government’s full focus.

At one National Security Committee meeting soon after Howard had returned from the US, the mention of al Qaeda prompted one senior departmental official to interject that nobody had ever heard of them until September 11. He wasn’t quite correct—there had been briefings on al Qaeda, it was just that nobody had paid much attention until now.

Not surprisingly, September 11 prompted a dramatic increase in ASIO’s workload. As soon as the attacks occurred, the agency undertook a systematic search of all the manifests of airlines flying passengers within or to Australia. Who was flying on the planes? Where were they coming from? And what about the next day, and the day after that? ASIO officers were granted access to the airlines’ databases, looking for anyone whose names they already knew under any of the aliases they had previously used. But beyond that, they didn’t really know what they were looking for; anything unusual; anything which might flag a potential terrorist and prevent a repeat of what had just happened in the United States.

People who had undertaken militia-style training in Afghanistan or Pakistan were at the top of the list. In the lead-up to the Sydney Olympics,

Cabinet had been briefed on the presence of such people in Australia. Within weeks of September 11, a handful were intercepted at Sydney Airport and arrested. They were headed for Pakistan carrying equipment, including long-life batteries, which made Australian agents suspicious. ASIO believed they were going to join the insurgents. Their passports were cancelled.

On 2 October 2001, Cabinet increased ASIO's powers and created new terrorism offences. Other changes followed. In December, the government took more steps to toughen anti-terrorism laws and gave ASIO the power to question those who might have information about terrorism without themselves being involved and, in some circumstances, to detain them for up to 48 hours with a lawyer.

The powers were controversial but in the new climate, the government argued they were necessary.

In the period that followed the US attacks, Australian security agents knocked on a lot of doors. They wanted to stir things up, to metaphorically turn the lights on so that anyone who might be nervous or up to no good could be flushed out. There were more Australian residents known to have trained with militants in Pakistan than Americans. By 2011, some of the people who were of interest to the agencies back then were in jail.

Over the two years following September 11, ASIO undertook to track down every Australian who had done such paramilitary training abroad. Agents fanned out across the world, from Bali to just inside the Arctic Circle.

In November 2010, former West Australian Andrew Ibrahim Wenham, who had trained with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front at a Jemaah Islamiyah base in the Philippines, came to public attention in the Norwegian town of Tromso. Wenham revealed to reporters that he had formerly been associated with JI and had been living in Tromso with his Norwegian wife since 2002. The post-2001 dragnet had uncovered his whereabouts—ASIO had started visiting him there the following year.

In December 2001, the work of a range of intelligence agencies enabled Singaporean authorities to foil a plot by JI operatives to attack the embassies of the US, Britain, Israel and Australia. But there were failures, too. The 2004 Flood inquiry found that before the Singapore arrests, too little was known about JI and, by that time, Australian agencies and those in the region 'should have known … much more'.

After the terrorist attacks in the US and Indonesia, ASIO's work captured much more attention, especially in relation to counter-terrorism. Having the public's confidence at a time of uncertainty and, in some cases, anxiety was important. It was a difficult line to walk for the agency, trying to demystify its activities while remaining necessarily in the shadows.

Over the years, ASIO has tried to make the basics of its operation better understood. It must deal with the internal contradiction of being an organisation which is, by its nature, somewhat clandestine, but which like any busy government agency also needs new recruits. As part of an accessibility drive, it appointed public affairs officers to (anonymously) take media calls. Journalists who rang were able to speak to a faceless official voice, who identified him or herself only by first name and when being quoted could be given no name at all except spokesperson. These voices were always very friendly. When I had reason to call and speak to, say, 'John', I enjoyed occasionally asking 'John who?' I always got the same polite and mostly good-humoured response: none.

*

On the morning of 12 October 2002, Attorney-General Daryl Williams had held a news conference at his Perth electorate office to issue a warning about a terrorist threat—but not to holidaymakers. Rather, he said, the threat was to 'energy production and distribution infrastructure'—power plants, oil refineries and gas lines. Williams warned reporters:

> We've seen Osama bin Laden in two statements, broadcast on Middle East television, refer to Australia specifically so we can't be complacent. On the other hand, there is no cause for alarm. We are not aware of any specific threat to Australia or Australian interests but the generalised threat remains.

Two weeks earlier, on 28 September, ASIO had raised the threat level for Australians in Indonesia to 'high'. But the travel advice issued by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which until then had received little attention, was not especially beefed up. In seeming contrast, the US State Department had issued a worldwide warning about an al Qaeda threat to 'soft targets' including bars and restaurants.

Howard, Williams and Foreign Minister Alexander Downer later denied receiving any specific advice about possible threats in Bali. Four days after the bombings, Howard acknowledged in Parliament that he had been aware of US intelligence which mentioned Bali as a potential terrorist target. But he said Australian travel warnings had already been 'at a high level' anyway. After the bombs went off, there was public anger over the travel advice. Government ministers knew this could happen, some people said. They should have warned us.

After that, ministers were acutely aware of their duty of care in warning Australians travelling abroad of the risks they faced. There were discussions around the Cabinet table about the difficulty of trying to balance the obligation to be honest with travellers against the potential to offend neighbouring countries, and do diplomatic damage. Indonesia was very unhappy about the upgraded travel warnings which followed the Bali bombings. But the Australian government decided that the risk of not upgrading them and then having a repeat incident was not one it was prepared to take.

A year after September 11, the Bali attacks frightened a lot of Australians all over again and brought terrorism much closer to home. Before the Bali bombings, the Attorney-General's Department was looking

at how to advise people on what to do in an emergency. But in December 2002 the scope of the project suddenly changed. The Prime Minister intervened, directing his department to take over planning for what was becoming a much bigger national campaign. Government-commissioned research found certain sections of the community were very fearful of a terrorist attack, most particularly the elderly. Those who lived in country areas were concerned but also believed that any attack would not directly affect them. The research found Australians wanted the government to act, somehow, on security.

What emerged was a $15 million national awareness campaign—'Let's Look Out for Australia'—involving television, radio and print advertising and direct mail-outs to households. 'I don't want Australians to become frightened, I don't want Australians to stop living their ordinary lives,' Howard said, launching the campaign. 'If that happens then the terrorists win.'

The campaign became associated with the slogan 'Be alert, but not alarmed', a phrase Howard and other ministers used, and which was repeated in the advertising. In the information kit mailed to households was a card bearing contact information for a national hotline and some emergency phone numbers, with space for householders to add their own and a magnet glued on the back.

The magnet plan was almost derailed just before Christmas, when the department could not source enough magnets in Australia. To bring magnets by sea would take time, and there were logistical problems bringing them in by air as they needed to be specially encased to be carried on aircraft. As businesses were shutting down for Christmas, the department's advertising agency finally found a supplier. Students and other casual employees here hired to work over the summer holidays and glue magnets to cards. The kits were dispatched in the new year.

The magnet made great fodder for stand-up comedians, who declared it the government's secret weapon in the war on terrorism. Spoof lapel badges declared: 'Be alert. The world needs more lerts.' The following year, the

magnet-based campaign would win a Privacy International tongue-in-cheek award, selected among 5000 nominees from thirty-five countries as the world's most stupid security measure. But it certainly won points for being memorable and the slogan is still talked about. In advertising terms, that is a raging success.

The campaign's national security hotline for tip-offs about potential threats, for which the government had to recruit and second people with backgrounds in security, attracted a huge number of calls and was still operating in 2011. Nine years on, the Labor government considered the ratio of good value information to nuisance calls made the hotline still worth the cost and effort.

But in those months after Bali, the level of intelligence processing bordered on ridiculous. Every snippet which came in was analysed. So much information—and with so little scrutiny of its origins—was being passed up the line to senior levels of government that it became virtually unmanageable. At one point, an entire task force was set up involving ministers and senior officials based on what turned out to be a single, uncorroborated piece of information in an anonymous phone call.

*

Not long after the Bali bombings, with the security agencies convinced they knew who was responsible, public attention naturally turned to the next big question: why?

The government was convinced that Australians had not been targeted specifically by nationality. It declared publicly that intelligence had suggested the bombings had been a general attack on westerners and their culture. But Howard and his ministers expected that many Australians would not see it that way. They had to manage the politics.

In Cabinet, ministers discussed how they should respond to the inevitable links that would be drawn between Australia's role in the Middle East and the terrible Bali attack. '[We were] conscious we had to have a

political strategy for dealing with the assertions that would be made to that effect,' former Finance Minister Nick Minchin said.

Five days after the bombings, US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage was interviewed on ABC TV's *7.30 Report* by journalist (later Federal Labor MP) Maxine McKew. Armitage said that following the collapse of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, al Qaeda's activities had 'decentralised'. But he said that it had been active in South-East Asia for at least four years.

> MAXINE MCKEW: So what does that say about the success or otherwise of the war on terror? I mean, from where we sit at the moment, Al Qaeda is very much in business.
>
> RICHARD ARMITAGE: It certainly is very much in business. I know President Bush prepared our populace. I think John Howard did the same for Australians by saying that this is a long war. It's not going to be over easily or quickly. We have a virulent enemy and we'll be at it for years and we'll continue it.
>
> MAXINE MCKEW: But it doesn't look like we're even close to winning.
>
> RICHARD ARMITAGE: I think people in Afghanistan, three million schoolchildren who just returned to school, wouldn't quite share your view.

The next morning, on 18 October, John Howard flew to Bali with Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson and Opposition Leader Simon Crean. At a news conference there, Howard was asked about Osama bin Laden having previously singled out Australia over its military involvement. 'To my recollection the only time that bin Laden made a particular reference to Australia was in relation not to our association with

the United States but rather in relation to the intervention in East Timor,' Howard replied, referring to a videotape broadcast in November 2001, in which the al Qaeda leader had labelled Australians 'crusaders' for their role there.

But almost a month after Howard's dismissal of bin Laden's past messages, the al Qaeda leader's accusations became more specific. On 12 November 2002, a new broadcast explicitly contradicted the government's insistence that what had happened in Bali had nothing to do with Australia's role in Afghanistan. In a broadcast on the al Jazeera Arabic television network, bin Laden's audio message said a range of attacks worldwide since September 11—including those against 'the British and Australians in the Bali explosions'—were simply 'reactions and reciprocal actions'.

> What do your governments want from their alliance with America in attacking us in Afghanistan? I mention in particular Britain, France, Italy, Canada, Germany and Australia. We warned Australia before not to join in [the war] in Afghanistan, and [against] its despicable effort to separate East Timor. It ignored the warning until it woke up to the sounds of explosions in Bali. Its government falsely claimed that they [the Australians] were not targeted.

The government continued to insist that it was Australians' western culture which made them a target, not their nationality.

By late 2002, another conflict was brewing which threatened to involve Australia further in the Middle East and with much greater controversy. The United States believed Iraq was building weapons of mass destruction, and was involved in a stand-off over its refusal to allow weapons inspections. A no-fly zone was already in place and the US was appealing to the UN to force Iraq's President, Saddam Hussein, to let the inspectors in. It was increasingly talking tough and the Australian government was backing it.

The issue was beginning to stir public passion and divide opinion in the United States and among its allies. In the *7.30 Report* interview of 17 October, Maxine McKew had also asked Richard Armitage about the speculation surrounding a US strike against Iraq and whether the focus on Iraq was a distraction from fighting terrorists. Armitage replied that the war on terrorism was global and that he didn't think the US was 'quite distracted as yet'.

> MAXINE McKEW: But why be distracted at all, given that Saddam Hussein does not appear to present an immediate threat and we know that al Qaeda certainly does?
>
> RICHARD ARMITAGE: I think you're making a very dangerous bet on the future. I just took part in a joint inquiry here. I had to testify about our failings regarding 9/11. And I can't imagine what sort of inquiry would be held if Saddam Hussein had provided to some terrorist group weapons of mass destruction and they were used against my society and, for that matter, against yours. We're not going to wait. The one thing we don't have is the luxury of time.

8

ON TWO FRONTS

AS THE US GOVERNMENT shaped up for a military assault on Iraq, many Australians became convinced that the Howard government was champing to go, too.

But, Prime Minister John Howard wanted to explore every alternative first. He also wanted every preparation made so Australia could join the operation but did not want the US to assume he was committed, and resisted making a final decision until the very last moment.

The silks in the Attorney-General's Department were working overtime, checking the legalities of every possible option. The man who would become Attorney-General, Philip Ruddock, later that year said the public perception was wildly different from the reality.

> You've had … people surmising that we were willing to go into Iraq long before the decision was taken and [that] the decision, when it was taken, was just a confirmation of what we'd already planned to do … And nothing could be further from the truth. We were receiving advice. We were certainly looking at if we did elect to go what we would be able to do. But there was certainly no fait accompli earlier.

However, for an operation to which Australia wasn't formally committed, the preparation was remarkable.

In Washington, the planning for an invasion of Iraq began well before Australia's troops came home from Afghanistan in late 2002. Indeed, among senior American officials, it was being discussed as early as late 2001, before the Australians had even been sent.

As tensions between the US and Iraq built throughout 2002, so did speculation from some critics that President Bush was simply looking to deal with unfinished business from the administration of his father, George Bush senior.

Australia's Defence Minister, Robert Hill, didn't think that was behind it. Rather, he saw it as the reaction of a government consumed by the massive intelligence failures which had allowed the preparations for the September 11 attacks to go undetected. 'From my observations it was much more about a concern that here is another potential threat, and maybe we are not adequately facing up to it, and if we get caught out this time, that will be a real failure of responsibility,' Hill said.

But for some in the US administration, Iraq was earmarked as a target not only immediately after September 11, but long before it. Within hours of the attacks, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was talking to his aides about the possibility of going after Iraqi President Saddam Hussein as well as Osama bin Laden. Four days later, at a Camp David retreat with the President and his most senior advisers, Rumsfeld suggested the attacks presented 'an opportunity' to deal with this long-running problem.

In 1998, Rumsfeld had chaired an independent Congress-appointed commission into the 'ballistic missile threat to the United States' which found that the US faced a real threat from China, Russia, Iran, North Korea and Iraq. The commission found that US intelligence was not reporting the threat accurately and that therefore there might be no warning of an attack. It also said that Iraq's weapons program would be at the stage where it would be able to strike the US in about ten years.

As his six-month ballistic missile inquiry was just beginning, Rumsfeld put his name to a letter from a neoconservative think-tank, the Project for the New American Century, urging President Bill Clinton to launch military strikes against Iraq for its recalcitrance on weapons inspections and remove Saddam Hussein and his government from office. The letter argued that the security of US forces in the Middle East, the future of Israel and moderate Arab states, and 'a significant portion of the world's supply of oil' were at

stake. Among the other 18 signatories were Richard Armitage, who three years later would become Deputy Secretary in the State Department, Bob Zoellick, who would become Bush's Trade Representative, and Paul Wolfowitz, who would be Rumsfeld's Deputy Secretary in Defense.

At Camp David on September 15, Wolfowitz—like Rumsfeld—was in favour of launching strikes against Iraq. He thought it would be easier to fight and win a war there than in Afghanistan, where the landscape was challenging and history would be against them. But there were other Bush advisers who did not like the idea, including Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of State Colin Powell, who was the most strenuously opposed to seeking to link Iraq with September 11. The following day, Bush decided to put off any plan to go into Iraq, saying they would 'return to that question' later.

Australia's ambassador to Washington, Michael Thawley, knew very well how Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz felt about the Iraqi regime. On the day of the attacks, when John Howard was in Washington, Thawley told the Prime Minister that he thought action against Iraq would be on the US agenda. Thawley said:

> It wasn't so much whether Iraq had to be dealt with, but when … And there was a division of opinion here [in the US] … The division of opinion within the Administration was not 'did something have to be done about Iraq'. Everyone actually agreed with that … The question was at what point?

While the hawkish US Defense Department wanted to deal with it immediately, Powell's State Department wanted to wait until Afghanistan and Pakistan had been, in the words of one official, 'sorted out'. Once the US considered that done, early in 2002, preparations for Iraq were beginning in earnest.

For the Australian government, the decision was not so straightforward. There was division internationally over whether Iraq even had weapons of

mass destruction, or any sign of the makings of them, let alone how advanced they might be. Some countries vehemently opposed making military threats without giving Iraq a greater chance to respond to UN pressure.

There was much to consider. Howard was adamant that Australia would take its time and that there would be a traceable decision-making process. And he didn't want America taking the alliance for granted. At the Queensland Liberal Council meeting in Brisbane in mid-April 2002, he gathered federal ministers backstage and told them with, he said, a heavy heart, that a military operation in Iraq was likely. He could see where things were headed.

*

On Howard's June 2002 trip to Washington, the prospect of a second war in the Middle East was high on the list of matters discussed. On Sunday, 9 June, the day after he arrived, the Prime Minister and the head of his Office of National Assessments, Kim Jones, had lunch with the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, George Tenet. Iraq was on the menu, and specifically whether Australia would commit.

Back at the Willard Hotel, at a news conference after the lunch, Howard declined to say what was discussed. My colleagues and I pressed the Prime Minister for details of his conversation with the CIA chief and some indication about the state of advancement of plans. We got nowhere then and not much further when we had the chance to ask again in the days which followed. But Howard emphasised Australia would make no commitment to any Iraq invasion until it had received a request. 'There is no advance, sight unseen, commitment from Australia in relation to any American action,' Howard told us.

Although the US rightly took Australia's willingness to engage on the subject as a sign it would be there, strictly speaking the Prime Minister was telling the truth. Behind the scenes, the government was stressing to the US

administration at every level that it shouldn't be making assumptions. And besides, Australia had Cabinet processes to follow before forces could go anywhere. The sub-text was that if things were to move quickly, the Australian government needed to be kept abreast.

When Howard arrived in Washington on 8 June, he had not secured a meeting with the President. Usually locked-in well before leaving home, this time there was no mention of a meeting in the printed program we were given on arrival in Washington. Over the first couple of days, Howard attended gatherings of the International Democratic Union (IDU), a kind of political conservatives' club. At an IDU dinner at the White House on 10 June, Howard toasted the host:

> Can I simply say to you, Mr President, thank you for what you are doing not only for your own nation, for the cause of freedom, but also for mankind generally around the world. The leadership of the United States has been magnificent. Your own personal contribution to the values we all share and hold so dear has been exemplary.

Howard got his meeting. On the day he was due to fly out for home, Thursday, 13 June, the two men met in the Oval Office, and made some brief remarks:

> The United States has got a great friend in Australia, and I've got a personal friend in the Prime Minister. And I want to thank you for your steadfast support when it comes to fighting terror. I reminded the people here in the meeting that the last time the Prime Minister and I visited here in America was on September the 10th, and our world was changed forever the next day. I found it really interesting that one of our best friends was with the President of the United States the day before the attack. And our

> best friend will be with us at the end of this war, too. And that's really comforting to know.

Standing there listening to the President, I recall thinking it seemed a strange choice of words. Why would the President have 'found it really interesting'? It sounded like he hadn't been aware of it himself and that maybe it might have been he who had to be reminded.

In fact, five months later in November 2002, journalist Bob Woodward's account of the events surrounding September 11, *Bush At War,* seemed to suggest, similarly, that the president did not readily recall spending time with Howard at the White House on 10 September. In an interview for the book, Woodward asked Bush about a suggestion that his security advisers had been developing a plan to eliminate al Qaeda prior to September 11—a plan which had originally been due on his desk on 10 September. Bush queried the date: 'It would have been odd to come September the 10th because I was in Florida on September the 10th, so I don't think they would have been briefing me in Florida.'

He didn't leave for Florida until the afternoon and for most of the working day he was in Washington with John Howard: at the Navy Yard for the ANZUS 50th anniversary ceremony, and then again in the Oval Office for talks which continued through a White House lunch. But speaking to Woodward less than a year after the meetings and the fateful events which followed, he didn't seem to remember any of it.

In contrast, Howard recalled it clearly and felt it deeply:

> Thank you very much, Mr. President. There is something rather poignant about us meeting again in this Oval Office, and remembering the last time was the 10th of September. I said to the Congress yesterday that America had no better friend anywhere in the world than Australia. I want to put on record the admiration of the Australian people for the tremendous leadership that you've displayed, Mr. President, over the past nine months.

He described Australia as ‘a firm and faithful friend’. Indeed, much has been made in the years since then of the personal friendship which grew up between these two men while they were at the helms in their respective countries. But at that point, it had not fully developed. And it wasn’t the Afghanistan War—the fruits of the events of that previous September—which truly forged it. It was Iraq.

Although the leaders considered they had won the war against terrorists in Afghanistan and were preparing to withdraw, on that June day in the Oval Office, they were still talking up the terrorism threat. And Iraq is where Bush thought it was.

> We are in there with you in the fight against terror. It still has a long way to go, and I think it’s very important that the people don’t imagine that the fight is anywhere near complete. And there will be a lot of commitment on our part, and we do respect and admire the contribution that you’re making as the leader of the world’s response.

According to the usual protocols, they then took two questions from US journalists and two from the Australians. When he was asked about Iraq directly, Howard was carefully non-committal:

> Clearly, Iraq’s behaviour … in relation to the weapons of mass destruction has been offensive to many countries, including the United States and Australia. But the question of any action by the United States is a matter for the United States. And I’ve indicated before in Australia, and I repeat now that if there are any approaches made to Australia, we’d consider them in the circumstances, at the time, if they occur.

President Bush also responded: ‘Yes, I told the Prime Minister there are no war plans on my desk.’ He may have been keeping them in a drawer

because they were certainly being drafted.

*

With Afghanistan, Australia, initially, had been keener than the United States that it be part of the fray. Now, it seemed to be the other way around. This time, the Americans definitely wanted a coalition. And this time, they most definitely wanted Australia in it.

Obtaining a UN Security Council resolution endorsing war was proving problematic. There had been 16 resolutions before 2002, followed that year by Resolution 1441. It warned of ‘serious consequences’ for non-compliance with weapons inspections but stopped short of endorsing military action. Some of the more powerful among the European countries were reluctant supporters of the resolution and firmly opposed to war. So the Americans needed to form a core of supportive allies who might be willing to proceed.

As they worked out their options, they invited Australia to be a part of the planning. It had proven its reliability in the Afghan conflict and its soldiers had distinguished themselves. It would have a seat at the table. The idea fitted well with the Howard government’s preferred method of warfare. Being involved at the planning stage allowed Australia to stay across US thinking and have a much greater say in where its forces might go and what they might do in the event they were to take part. It meant that, as they had in Afghanistan, they could be there at the beginning, doing what Armitage subsequently described as the ‘dirty and dangerous work’, and then when that phase was over, they—and Australia—could get out.

The White House first raised the issue of Australia participating in the planning phase with Ambassador Thawley early in 2002. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, followed up, again through Thawley. Wolfowitz and Thawley had a good relationship and spoke regularly. Then in June, Defence sent two officers to Washington for talks at the Pentagon. The then head of Strategic Operations, Air Vice

Marshal Al Titheridge, and the man who was due to take over his job, Ken Gillespie, got the call and were to leave two days later—on Gillespie's 50th birthday. That morning, Chief of Army General Peter Cosgrove promoted Gillespie to Major General a month early, on the spot. 'We all had hugs and kisses,' Gillespie said. 'And I went down and got in a car with Al Titheridge and we went to Washington.'

At the airport, on departure, they were met by the Director General Joint Operations and Plans, Brigadier Maurie McNarn, who had prepared a military assessment on a possible Iraq operation—a shopping list of options—based on watching the cable traffic. (McNarn would later broaden it out to a full strategic assessment, at Cosgrove's request.)

Gillespie missed his birthday party but the Qantas staff gave him a cake. When he arrived at the Pentagon, they had a cake there, too.

The Americans made it clear to Titheridge and Gillespie that they were planning an Iraq operation and wanted to bring Australia in as a 'trusted friend'. While they were away, then director general of joint operations and plans Brigadier Maurie McNarn prepared a strategic assessment on the proposed operation and in July, as they returned, McNarn and a team of others were sent to CENTCOM in Tampa to keep track of the way things were moving and how fast. When the newly promoted General Peter Cosgrove went to Washington after taking over as Chief of the Defence Force in early July, the Commander of US Central Command, General Tommy Franks, raised the Iraq issue.

'We were, you know, keeping our big ears flapping,' Cosgrove said. But it was more than keeping tabs. Australia and John Howard were moving into the inner circle.

*

In early September of 2002, a week before he was to address the UN General Assembly, Bush had rung Howard to discuss possible further steps on the Iraq issue. Throughout the previous year, Bush had been canvassing

views around the world and he counted Howard among a group of leaders from Europe and Asia who shared his assessment that Saddam posed a threat.

But inside the Australian government, some were less convinced. The differences of view were exacerbated by the fact that the two key intelligence assessment agencies, the Office of National Assessments, under the Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio, and the Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO) also had differing views on the state of Saddam's arsenal.

While ONA had started out with reservations, its assessments had hardened up heading into 2003 and more closely matched the assurances coming out of US agencies. DIO agreed Iraq had a weapons program, but it remained far less convinced of its level of development or that Saddam had anything resembling plans to use it. Defence Minister Robert Hill noted the differing advice. They could not both be right. As Australia didn't collect a great deal of its own raw intelligence, he decided he needed another opinion. So Hill went to London and was given access to the British intelligence agencies, whose judgment he felt he could trust. Their assessments on Iraq broadly supported the US conclusions.

To his dismay, he discovered that the British analysis was not based on British intelligence alone, but was actually a hybrid with input from a range of countries including Russia and France (and made more confusing by the fact that the French and Russian governments were opposing a military response). These other countries' sources were, in turn, unknown. So, while the British intelligence assessment tended to back the US position, Hill could not assess the quality of its base material.

His hoped-for second opinion, in the pure sense, did not exist. In the end, he went home concluding that the US and British intelligence must be right.

*

As the government mulled over its Iraq position, the ADF had become increasingly anxious. It had to anticipate the possibility of military action and prepare accordingly, assessing what it might be asked to do and what it could offer. In the end, as it always did, the decision would lie with the executive government.

In late 2002, the ADF had presented the ‘shopping list’ of options for participating in an Iraq invasion. Some ministers were shocked at what wouldn’t be possible, due to gaps in capability. Regardless, Defence was pressing for a decision. Cosgrove said:

> SAS were on that list but so were armoured regiments, armoured reconnaissance regiments, infantry battalions, artillery—they were all on there. And you slimmed the list down as you got closer and closer and closer to a government intention to be part of a force. And obviously that slimming process has to be refined reasonably quickly, otherwise you’re preparing half of the Defence force with taxpayers’ dollars, only to say: ‘But you’re staying home.’

Defence was aware that Howard’s preferred form of military intervention was always quick and clean—in at the pointy end and then out, fast. He wanted deployments to be effective and short. Downer shared his view:

> The hardest stuff actually is the front end of the war. We’re happy to help with that. We’ll bomb them, we’ll fight them in the streets. We’ll do all of that until you throw out the enemy and then we—we’re in Australia—we’re a long way away. We have a lot of commitments in South-East Asia and the South Pacific and we will retreat back there.

As ever, Australia's physical distance from any likely Middle East action was a consideration. Having been caught short back in 1998, Defence was acutely aware of it. Given the preparation time required for a deployment, the military planners were concerned that if Australia finally resolved to go, the war could well be over. If a government decided that it would be prudent to join—to uphold the US alliance, or for any other reason—missing the whistle might not be ideal.

In Tampa, Brigadier McNarn and his team were in a difficult position. Australia had not committed to join the operation and the Americans were wanting a response. McNarn was issued with two sets of instructions—one written and one verbal. The written instructions were not to commit Australia to anything. The verbal instructions were completely different. He was told to do everything necessary to make sure Australia was in a position to deploy, if—or when—a decision was made. He made arrangements for communications and intelligence sharing and ordered fuel and even bombs. He needed to book aircraft landing slots and that required preliminary basing arrangements, so negotiations began, based on US plans.

When he asked what would happen if he made these preparations and Australia decided not to go, he was told: 'That's a risk that you have to assume.'

McNarn thought, by that stage, the consequences of not going would have been serious for the alliance. 'If we'd said we weren't going you would've been persona non-grata the next day, as happened with the Canadians,' McNarn said. 'The only one the Americans will turn on faster than an enemy is an ally who creates an expectation and then pulls out.'

As preparations for the hypothetical commitment continued, Air Vice Marshal Angus Houston was again dispatched with McNarn and work further on finding them all a home, and in September 2002, went to all of the Gulf countries and Jordan. Houston went back again in December to seal a range of agreements. By then, McNarn was based in the Middle East full time and Defence had decided what it would send if the signal was given.

The C-130 Hercules and FA-18 Hornets would be based in Qatar, with some Australians also at the Coalition Air Operations Centre in Saudi Arabia, from where any air war would be controlled. Houston had to organise overflight rights for the P3 Orions with the United Arab Emirates. He also visited Oman and Bahrain, which would host logistic support. And this time, the Special Forces would be based in Jordan. In two weeks, it was done. On 10 January 2003, Cabinet approved the pre-positioning of the Australian Special Forces and some of the other assets, ready to move into Iraq if the word was given. A squadron of commandos from the 4th Royal Australian Regiment was being pre-deployed, along with 30 Navy clearance divers aboard HMAS *Kanimbla*, the P3 Orion surveillance aircraft, C-130s and a squadron of the FA-18 Hornets. Howard announced the decision the same day.

The forces were farewelled on Valentine's Day. 'However long your deployment, know that it is very valuable and know that we will bring you home safe and sound as soon as we can,' Cosgrove told them. 'God bless you, Godspeed, successful mission, and a speedy and safe return.'

Opposition leader Simon Crean was at the farewell, too. He also wished the troops well, but said he thought they shouldn't be going. It was a controversial distinction. Labor's opposition to the war would become stronger and louder throughout the two years that followed.

But as the *Kanimbla* sailed, all was not well aboard Her Majesty's Australian Ship, either. Some of the sailors objected to being given an anthrax vaccination at sea, concerned about potential side-effects. A group was sent home for refusal. In Senate Budget Estimates committee hearings, Cosgrove and his minister, Robert Hill, faced questioning about the protocols of administering the vaccine. Cosgrove told me:

> I sent a little note to one of my chaps to find out if we had any vaccine over in the local medical centre. Turned out that we did. So I made the announcement to the honourable senators that I

was taking all the service chiefs with me at lunchtime to get vaccinated.

During the fracas, Hill told me—off the record—that he had also had the shot. But he refused to let me write about it at the time.

*

As 2003 began, still there was no formal commitment. McNarn obtained copies of the slides which were to be used to brief Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair during a retreat at Camp David, so Howard had the same information ahead of speaking to Bush by phone.

Prior to that, in late 2002, he had also secured details of 20 000 potential bombing targets and carried the paperwork back to Australia by hand. That enabled Defence Force to choose tasks for the Australian forces carefully to minimise risk as the Government instructed. Around the same time, he and policy adviser Bernard Philip also prepared a timeline, which they called ‘The Road to War’, charting military, economic and political considerations and every other factor from the weather to the phases of the moon, to try to work out when the Americans might launch. They came up with March as the most likely time. Not intended for official use, its findings were eventually conveyed to Howard and—to the dismay of some Canberra-based military planners—helped persuade him that he could afford to delay a bit longer.

By early 2003, things were moving apace in Washington. Vice President Dick Cheney had joined the voices calling for action, describing Saddam Hussein as ‘a mortal threat’ to the United States.

The previous October, a National Intelligence Estimate from the CIA had suggested there was construction taking place at Iraqi facilities previously used for weapons development. In the new year, UN weapons inspectors led by Mohamed ElBaradei and Hans Blix had gone to Iraq but could find no evidence of a weapons program. The US didn’t accept their

findings and wanted to press on with military action, continuing to argue that there were signs Saddam was developing weapons.

National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice had already warned publicly of the risk that ‘the smoking gun’ could become ‘a mushroom cloud’. On February 5, Secretary of State Colin Powell made a presentation to the UN Security Council alleging US intelligence had discovered that Iraq was trying to buy aluminium tubes used in uranium enrichment.

The US considered that Iraq had form on that front. In May 2001, a shipment of tubes manufactured in China and bound for Iraq via Jordan had been intercepted, thanks to a tip-off received by the Australian Secret Intelligence Service. It had been an intelligence coup for Australia which won kudos with its bigger ally. The former ONA analyst Andrew Wilkie—described it to ABC Television’s *Four Corners* program in 2003: ‘It was a very, very rare opportunity to be a big player in the main global issue, and the issue that was of most importance in London and Washington. You know, we were pretty proud of it at the time.’

President Bush had mentioned the aluminium tubes in his address to the UN General Assembly on 12 September 2002. Foreign Minister Downer also mentioned them in Parliament, a few days later: ‘Australian intelligence agencies believe there is evidence of a pattern of acquisition of equipment which could be used in a uranium enrichment program. Iraq’s attempted acquisition of very specific types of aluminium tubes may be part of that pattern.’

It was not the only evidence the US claimed to have. Bush had also previously declared that Iraq had tried to buy yellowcake from the African country of Niger. A former US diplomat, Joe Wilson, had been sent to investigate and found the allegation to be untrue. When his warnings to the government were ignored, he went public. In apparent retribution, a newspaper leak outed Wilson’s wife, Valerie Plame, as a covert CIA operative. A grand jury investigation into what was an offence under law—revealing the identity of a US spy—led to presidential adviser Lewis ‘Scooter’ Libby being convicted of obstruction of justice, making false

statements and perjury. In 2007, President Bush commuted the jail term which had formed part of his sentence.

The sum total of all of this—even as it was known at the time—was that it was messy, very messy. In deciding whether to join any Iraq invasion, the Australian government had to sift through it all. This was not a decision like the one to go into Afghanistan—that was sparked by an unexpected event, an emergency, and Howard and the government had an almost reflexive response. This confrontation had been brewing for years, indeed there had been confrontations already.

There were many questions and, unlike for Afghanistan, more time to ponder them. If the government formally joined an attack on Iraq, what would it mean for Australia's defence forces? What was the risk to those who might be deployed? What about the ADF's capability if another threat or emergency appeared somewhere else? What would it mean for the alliance if Australia said Yes? Or No? What were the implications for global security and for international relations, given that chunks of Europe were implacably opposed? What about Australian public opinion, which was decidedly against it? And the threshold question: was it actually necessary?

In February 2003, Howard made one last swing through the US and Britain to talk it through. Again, he saw Bush in Washington. He also saw Vice President Cheney, Secretary of State Powell and Deputy Armitage, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and Trade Representative Bob Zoellick.

Soon after arriving, Howard expressed Australia's ongoing concern about the Iraq situation: 'It remains the wish of the Australian government, if it's possible… in the event that force becomes necessary that there be a United Nations resolution.'

The next day, at the White House, the Australian journalists had a pow-wow to determine how to use our two-question allocation. We drafted questions and drew straws for who would ask them. The first would be about whether the President considered Australia part of what he was

calling the ‘coalition of the willing’. He replied that it was ‘up to John to decide’.

I got the nod to deliver the second question: ‘Mr. President, there are many Australians and others who are still not convinced that they should be going with you to war. At this late stage, what’s your personal message to them?’

Bush said his personal message was that he wanted to ‘keep the peace and make the world more peaceful’:

> I understand why people don’t like to commit the military to action. I can understand that. I’m the person in this country that hugs the mothers and the widows if their son or husband dies. I know people would like to avoid armed conflict. And so would I. But the risks of doing nothing far outweigh the risks of whatever it takes to disarm Saddam Hussein.

The President said he also had great compassion and concern for the Iraqi people who had been ‘tortured and brutalised … and raped’ for disagreeing with Saddam Hussein.

> In this country and in Australia people believe that everybody has got worth, everybody counts, that everybody is equal in the eyes of the Almighty. So the issue is not only peace, the issue is freedom and liberty. I made it clear in my State of the Union [address]—and the people of Australia must understand this—I don’t believe liberty is America’s gift to the world; I believe it is God’s gift to humanity. Thank you, all.

There is a personal footnote to the exchange along with his personal message. At that moment, on the other side of the world in a hotel room in Hanoi, my father, who was on a business trip, happened to flick on the television. CNN was going live to the Oval Office and he suddenly realised

he could hear his daughter's voice. It was one of those funny reminders that this can be a weird job.

*

After Washington, Howard made a flying visit to New York to see UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and weapons inspector Dr Hans Blix, whose hastened report on Iraq was being unveiled the next day. We media folks caught the train, arriving in a snowy Manhattan at 2 am. Like Howard, we were booked into the very stuffed-shirt Upper East Side hotel, The Pierre, and would be checking out again not too many hours later.

In the morning, Howard had early talks with Blix at the hotel. Afterwards, journalists nabbed the grey-haired Swedish official in the lobby. 'I'm not telling the politicians what they should do,' Blix said. 'My job is to report honestly what we see.'

The hotel staff did not much appreciate having this ragtag media entourage door-stopping people in its very expensive establishment, despite the fact that our employers were forking out mightily for us to briefly rest there. At the posh Pierre, they seemed to think we were an untidy nuisance. As I tried to leave the hotel that morning, the doorman jammed the revolving door shut, locking me inside half-way round. From my 30-second public imprisonment between the panes of glass, I watched as he stepped away to hold open another door for a pair of the hotel's permanent residents, a high-haired New York matron and her small dog. Once they were safely on their way, I was allowed to emerge from my humiliation into the fresh winter air. It was not my favourite travel experience.

In London, Howard saw British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and Prime Minister Tony Blair. An upbeat Blair opened with a joke: 'First of all can I say how delighted I am to welcome Prime Minister Howard here to Downing Street, and to thank him for his courtesy in coming here and very diplomatically agreeing only to discuss the sport of rugby.' Blair might have dwelt longer on the subject, had he known that nine months later

England would go on to beat Australia in the World Cup final. But they moved on to other things, including a tightening of domestic security underway in London amid threats from terrorist organisations. ‘The threat the world faces today is disorder and chaos that comes from these types of groups operating throughout the world.’

In July 2005 we would be standing there at Downing Street again, a fortnight after British-born bombers had attacked the London metro system, and as a second round of bombs mercifully failed to detonate. There in 2003, the primary focus was Iraq, but Howard also made a link with another rogue regime: ‘If the world doesn’t deal with Iraq effectively, what price control in North Korea?’ He described the upcoming deliberations on the weapons inspectors’ report as ‘a big test for the Security Council’. ‘Those who believe in the authority of the Security Council will, I know, be hoping that the community of nations comes together and speaks with one voice,’ Howard said. He said that was where the ‘slim’ hope of a peaceful solution lay, ‘But it will also strengthen the Security Council, because if the Security Council fails this test it will have a crippling impact on its authority for years into the future.’

*

From London, Howard headed in the direction of home, stopping off in Jakarta to see Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri. With the hunt for Jemaah Islamiyah operatives underway in the Indonesian archipelago, and talk of war in the Middle East provoking accusations the West was anti-Islam, there was much to discuss.

Before heading to the palace, Howard said he would be making the point that Christians had taken up arms to defend Muslims in Kosovo in 1999. ‘It’s hardly a demonstration of lining up on religious grounds,’ he said. ‘I regard that as a quite absurd, monstrous distortion of what is at stake regarding Iraq.’

During his short stay in Jakarta, the Prime Minister and the rest of us stayed at the Marriott, a wide-fronted hotel with a sweeping driveway and a fully-windowed breakfast room out front. Six months later, it was bombed.

After a four-city, three-country, eight-day whirlwind, Howard returned home on Sunday, 16 February. The previous day, as part of a global day of protest, thousands of people had turned out at rallies around Australia shouting ‘no blood for oil!’

On 19 February, Howard made a diary note. ‘Anyone who thinks that I’m a warmonger should understand how I feel,’ he wrote. ‘I think about it all the time, have broken sleep and hope that a late capitulation (very unlikely) or assassination of Saddam will remove the need for military action.’ Still, the government waited and watched and did not make a decision.

On 25 February, less than a month before the invasion, Alexander Downer attended the inauguration of South Korea’s President Roh Moo-Hyun in Seoul. Colin Powell was also there and Downer took the opportunity to speak to him about the looming Iraq action. Downer’s message was straightforward: don’t assume. ‘I was explaining to him that although we had agreed to pre-position troops we had not, remember, we had not made any final decision about sending them into the war,’ Downer said. He told Powell that Bush had to first ring the Prime Minister—as he had done before the Afghan commitment—and Cabinet would then have to endorse it. ‘Oh,’ said Powell. ‘I didn’t realise that.’

As February wore into March, Howard was still having trouble sleeping. ‘The UN process has bogged down,’ he wrote in his diary. ‘The French appear hell-bent on a veto. The Russians are making similar noises. There is a sense in which it is all slipping away from Britain and the US. The momentum is all the other way.’

He realised the chance of a Security Council resolution was now extremely remote:

> That will make it hard and bitter in Australia. There will be legal debates and some in the parliamentary party may object if we finally decided to go it alone with the US and UK. So far the colleagues have been superb. Their loyalty, in trying times, has been remarkable. I have had some very dark moments before, but this is as hard as it gets … I think all of us realise that if this really does go 'pear-shaped', then that would be it for me. I should take the rap, for the sake of the party's future.

On Monday morning, 17 March, Howard took a call from Bush, who was on Air Force One. It was Sunday night where he was, somewhere over the Atlantic, on his way back to Washington from a mini-summit of allies to talk about Iraq. Four leaders had gathered on Terceira Island in the Portuguese Azores, in the mid-Atlantic ocean: Bush, Blair, the Spanish Prime Minister, Jose Maria Aznar, and the Portuguese Prime Minister, Jose Manuel Barroso. The only key ally missing among the central planners was Australia's John Howard.

Bush told Howard he was preparing to issue an ultimatum to Saddam. Howard asked if this was going to be a declaration of war. He told Bush he was worried about public opinion and that it would be a bad look if the US started the war without formally notifying one of its key allies first. Bush assured the Prime Minister he would be told.

Howard had very practical reasons for being concerned. Cabinet still had not yet endorsed a military commitment. Neither had the United Nations. The US and its backers had tried to persuade the Security Council to pass a resolution specifically endorsing military action, but had failed. Russia and France, particularly, were still refusing to support it. They wanted the weapons inspectors to be given more time. In some circles, there was talk of even another year. But Bush, Blair and their colleagues—including Howard—weren't having it. They were convinced Saddam was preparing to act. Another proposed resolution was withdrawn to avoid the Europeans wielding their veto.

It was a public holiday in Canberra for Canberra Day but ministers were arriving ahead of the parliamentary week. The government's decision had to be—formally and finally—made. That night, Howard assembled the Cabinet to sign off on an Australian deployment. He knew not everyone was happy. The Nationals' Warren Truss had already told him the party's supporters were uneasy, and that one of them had asked: 'Can't we, just this once, not go along with the Americans?'

Peter Costello and others confirm that in the Cabinet room, Howard sent the officials and the note-takers outside while the ministers had a political discussion about the implications of the war and Australia's involvement. Howard said:

> It was my habit when we took a big decision, and Iraq was a pretty big decision. And everybody knew it was around and occasionally it came up in general political discussion. I can't recall whether we did have a no-officials discussion … my recollection is that everybody supported it.

A Cabinet minute records only the decision they made. There is no official record of the conversation that preceded it.

*

The next day, Tuesday, 18 March, Bush called Howard again to let him know what he would say in his 'ultimatum' address, to be given that night. It was 2 pm in Washington—6 am Australian Eastern Daylight time. Howard pledged that 'Australian troops will fight if necessary'.

Howard wasn't alone among the leaders in worrying about public opinion. For Blair, things were especially precarious. Unlike his Australian counterparts, he needed a vote in Parliament to endorse war and losing it would cost his job. On the Tuesday night, London time, the British

Parliament voted to back Blair's position. It was the morning of Wednesday, 19 March in Canberra.

By 6 am the next morning—before Bush had declared war, and less than three days after Cabinet had given the go-ahead—Australian commandos had crossed the border into Iraq.

*

The Americans were conscious that they had promised Howard that he would get the heads-up when the official invasion was about to start. But despite the phone calls which had volleyed back and forth across the Pacific, it did not prove to be easy. The US decided to launch air strikes sooner than planned because it thought—incorrectly, as it turned out—that it had Saddam Hussein, cornered at a bunker complex in Baghdad. The US President had to give an address to the nation pronto. And that, in turn, meant America's good friends needed to be told. Fast.

The responsibility for contacting Howard fell to Richard Armitage, Washington's chief diplomatic liaison with the Asia-Pacific, who had made his own promise that the Prime Minister would be personally notified. For that, protocol dictated that he needed Australia's ambassador in Washington, Michael Thawley, to arrange the call.

It was the evening of 19 March 2003 in Washington, and already 20 March in Canberra. Armitage had three prime ministers to inform: Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, of the Philippines; Junichiro Koizumi, of Japan; and John Howard. 'I had a practical problem,' Armitage said in 2011. 'I had about an hour to find these three. So I got Gloria right away. I got Koizumi right away. I couldn't find Michael Thawley.'

He eventually tracked the ambassador down in meetings on Capitol Hill. 'Get down to my office now, do not pass go, come right away because we need to talk to the Prime Minister,' Armitage said, '… you need to inform Prime Minister Howard that this is in keeping with what I promised him.'

*

As the war unfolded, relations between the Australians and the Americans were not always as polite. Brigadier Maurie McNarn and his team in the Middle East found themselves sometimes in conflict with the US planners. When Australia was preparing to ‘play the red card’ and oppose certain American operational plans out of legal or other concerns, US military lawyers would brief them on issues which they themselves were unable to raise. The Australians were convinced that the US Air Force was sometimes conducting bombing raids simply to empty the arsenal with an eye to the next budget allocation. Once, when McNarn and his colleagues pointed out that the bombs they intended to use were inappropriate for urban areas, a two-star US Air Force general blasted them as ‘pencil dicks’. ‘I’m just reading your own operational brief,’ McNarn told him. It was clear the American hadn’t done the same.

The Australian commander was also appalled at the lack of planning beyond the combat phase. ‘There was no coherent plan to put the place back together,’ he said. ‘I actually briefed that back home before the war even started.’

Australia’s strategy was to minimise risk to its own forces but maximise political gain. It paid off. McNarn’s team deflected criticisms from some allies over Australia’s harm-minimisation approach and Howard survived the domestic political heat and won stronger ties with the US. ‘He played it brilliantly… We extracted maximum benefit …’ McNarn said. ‘Historically, we haven’t been that good at looking after our national interests,’ he said. ‘But I think this time we did. We just played like other countries do.’

McNarn and others advised Howard and Cosgrove both before and after the war, that Australia should not ‘hold ground’—take responsibility for a patch of land, after the combat phase. Eventually, under pressure from the British and the Dutch, it took on al Muthanna. That allowed the Dutch to leave. The same thing would happen in Afghanistan.

Howard later described the move to join the US-led coalition at war in Iraq as ‘the most controversial foreign affairs decision’ of his government. But that doesn’t mean he resiles from it. ‘I don’t have any regrets in relation to Iraq,’ Howard told me. ‘I mean, Iraq will probably be a reasonably functioning democracy in ten-years’ time. I’m that optimistic.’

And, referring to the wave of pro-democracy uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and elsewhere in the Arab world in early 2011: ‘What is happening now in the Middle East can’t reduce the likelihood of that.’

9

CAUSE AND EFFECT

WHILE THE GOVERNMENT WAS concentrating on the welfare of its troops, two other Australians abroad were also demanding attention. David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib were residing at the pleasure of the US President, at Camp X-Ray, Guantanamo Bay. The US base in Cuba was teeming with inmates in orange jumpsuits suspected of being terrorists or having links to terrorists apprehended in a worldwide sweep after September 11. The two Australians were picked up in Afghanistan and Pakistan respectively. Both were believed to have undertaken militia training with al Qaeda.

David Hicks had been captured by the Northern Alliance on its push into Kunduz in December 2001. Hicks had converted to Islam as a 26-year-old and travelled Europe, undertaking training with the Kosovo Liberation Army in 1999 before moving on to Pakistan to study in a madrassa and then crossing into Afghanistan.

In November 2001, he called his father in Adelaide on a satellite phone and told him he was going to help the Taliban defend Kabul. After alliance soldiers pulled him out of a taxi van at a checkpoint and sold him for a US $15,000 bounty to American soldiers, Hicks was taken to Sheberghan, near Mazar-i-Sharif, and interrogated. Distinctive among other prisoners because he was one of the few westerners, he was then flown to the USS *Peleliu* for further interrogation, where, according to one account, ‘His American interrogators were joined by unsympathetic representatives of his home country’.

The Australian has since said he was transferred to another ship, then to buildings on land where he alleges he was hit with a rifle butt, kicked and spat upon, before being taken to Kandahar, finally ending up a designated ‘enemy combatant’ at Guantanamo Bay.

Egyptian-born Mamdouh Habib had lived in Australia since 1980. He had taken out Australian citizenship, married a Lebanese-Australian woman, had four children and started a cleaning business. Habib told investigators that he went to Pakistan in July 2001 to look for an Islamic school for his children. A few days before the September 11 attacks, he was arrested on a bus from Quetta to Karachi after arguing with police who were trying to detain two German acquaintances with whom he was travelling. The German men reportedly admitted having trained with al Qaeda. After their government made representations they were sent home.

But Habib had been on security agencies' radar in the United States and Australia for some years. His phone number was found among the telephone records of a man nicknamed 'the blind sheikh'—Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman—who was jailed for the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. From Australia, Habib had spoken out in the cleric's defence. And he was among those interviewed as part of a security crackdown ahead of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games.

Once his past associations were revealed, Habib was transferred to American custody and sent to Egypt, where he alleges he was tortured. In Egypt, Habib made a number of confessions he later recanted as false and made under duress, including that he had trained some of the September 11 hijackers in martial arts and had had foreknowledge of the attacks themselves.

Classified US government prisoner profiles released by the Wikileaks website acknowledged that Habib's confessions, which the documents said included planning to poison a US river and hijack a Qantas jet and which Habib also denies, were made under 'extreme duress'.

After Egypt, he was sent to Guantanamo Bay.

*

Responsibility for the Hicks and Habib matters lay primarily with the Attorney-General. In September 2003, a ministerial reshuffle delivered a

change after Communications Minister Richard Alston announced he would step down to the backbench ahead of retiring from the Senate in February 2004. John Howard responded to speculation that Alston was in line for a diplomatic posting:

> We don't have any understanding about that if that's what you want to know. But I would not rule it out. I mean, I never rule out the idea of appointing people of real ability who've had senior minister experience to diplomatic positions. But if you're asking me if we've got some agreement that he goes to Chad or somewhere like that, no.

In fact, he went to London—but not for another year. Alston's old portfolio went to Daryl Williams, who was moved from the Attorney-General's job to make way for Howard loyalist Philip Ruddock.

There had been some frustration within the government that things were moving too slowly in the Attorney-General's portfolio, and that it was taking too long to get legislation and regulations in place to implement changes to anti-terrorism laws which the government had pushed through in the wake of both September 11 and the Bali bombings. The security agencies feared that if they arrested 'people of concern'—as they were described—the legal backing might not be there to detain or prosecute them. With the rearrangement of jobs, Ruddock was told to get things moving, and did. After July 2005, the whole process would become easier for the government with the Coalition parties having gained a majority in the Senate.

But there were frustrations about delays which went further afield. David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib were Australian citizens in custody at Guantanamo Bay and had not yet faced any kind of judicial proceedings. Unlike the governments of other countries, including Britain, which were applying to have their citizens returned, Australia had not sought extradition

for Hicks or Habib. ‘If I had asked for them to come back, Bush, I’m sure, would’ve been accommodating,’ Howard said.

But he didn’t want to do that. Under Australian law, their alleged conduct did not constitute an offence. If they were brought home, the government would have to let them go. ‘We got advice that they couldn’t be charged in Australia—that they would go free,’ Howard said. ‘And I thought that was inappropriate.’ The government had little affection for either of the incarcerated men and especially Hicks.

But they were concerned about proper legal process. ‘So it became a no-win situation,’ Howard said. As time wore on and the military commissions, established especially to try the Guantanamo inmates, had still not begun, the Australian government became very unhappy.

In the US, the legality of the military commissions was called into question and then successfully challenged before the US Supreme Court. The White House and the Congress became locked in a stand-off as the Bush administration tried to figure out how to resolve its legal problems, and congressional representatives demanded the government institute a proper legal process. All the while, the detainees in the orange jumpsuits remained at Guantanamo Bay.

Hicks’ case was at the top of the pile and was starting to capture public attention in Australia. Former Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson described the frustration: ‘That was an incredibly complicated and arcane and difficult issue because he had not offended Australian law as it stood at that time and yet everybody believed that he had behaved outrageously.’

At the end of January 2004, Philip Ruddock made a trip to Washington to urge the US government to find a resolution. He met with key Republican senators John McCain and Lindsay Graham to press the case. It was a busy day on the Hill and, at the time of the scheduled meeting with Graham, the senator was being constantly called into the chamber. Eventually Ruddock spoke with him, briefly, in a tearoom. The meeting with McCain was more formal, in the Arizona senator’s office. Ruddock put Australia’s case for ending the delays to the man who would later

become a Republican presidential candidate. While both senators gave him a good hearing, they were also adamant that Congress had a role in policing the administration's approach and would continue to play it, no matter how long it took.

Both Ruddock and Howard believed that the US should be given the time to make its case against each of the men, if it believed there was one. That process was more advanced in the case of Hicks than Habib. In relation to Habib, the government pressed for the US to present its evidence. 'If they had a basis for prosecuting him—evidence that they thought would be sufficient to prosecute him—they should deal with it,' Ruddock said. 'Once they said, "we've got nothing", we said, "well, he's got to come back".'

But while the government was lobbying for the process to hasten, Habib was not seeing much evidence of it. According to Mamdouh Habib, the first time he received an Australian government visitor—an official from the embassy in Washington—was in 2004, when he had been at Guantanamo Bay almost three years.

It was an American lawyer, Northwestern University's Joseph Margulies, who first assured him he would be going home. Margulies took up Habib's case and went to see him at Camp Echo, Guantanamo Bay, in late 2004. He addressed the Australian as 'Mr Habib' and had him uncuffed so they could shake hands. 'This is the first time I hear my name in Guantanamo Bay,' Habib told me. Margulies promised Habib he would get him out within a year. 'I said, he's joking.'

His next visitor, some time later, was the Australian embassy official, who asked him to sign some documents. He refused. Again, he thought he would never go home.

But Margulies turned up again too and this time, he was smiling. Habib was going to be freed. The former cleaning contractor didn't believe him. He had lost hope of seeing his wife again. At one stage interrogators had told him she was dead. He also feared the talk of freedom was all a trick and that he would be taken back to Egypt and not to Australia at all.

In Egypt, he had been tortured, and had told Margulies vivid and horrifying stories of being threatened, beaten and subjected to extreme forms of coercion. More than once, he said, he was blindfolded and shackled in a soundproof room which slowly filled with water until he had to stand on his toes to breathe. He alleged he was left that way for hours. It was not as bad as that at Guantanamo Bay, but Habib said the few weeks before he was released were some of his worst there. Kept in isolation, he was convinced his captors would kill him before they let him go, and at that point he had decided that being dead might be better.

In January 2005, Margulies returned and told him he would be taken back to Australia in two days. The lawyer would be travelling with him. He had acted for several Guantanamo inmates who were later released and Habib would be the only one he was allowed to accompany home.

Still suspicious, Habib had a request. ‘I want you to get some presents for my kids,’ he told Margulies. His youngest daughter, a one-year-old when he had left Australia in 2001, was about to turn five.

The lawyer was mildly incredulous. ‘You haven’t been on holidays. You’ve been in jail.’ Habib didn’t care. He wanted the presents. Margulies eventually procured a fluffy toy dolphin for the four-year-old and sunglasses for the others.

In January 2005, Habib was released without charge. He credits this to Margulies, not the Australian government. ‘Australia haven’t done it,’ he said. ‘My own country never done it.’

The day he was freed, he was given a pair of jeans, socks and shoes, a heavy jacket, a white T-shirt, some uncomfortable ‘American’ underwear, a blanket and a black bag. Then he was bound hand and foot, put into a cage in the back of a van and blindfolded. With six guards, he went by barge across a river and was driven to an airfield. They removed his blindfold to reveal a waiting jet but told him not to move or he would be shot. One of the Americans, a Muslim who knew Habib’s hotheaded reputation, told him not to do anything silly and assured him he really was going home.

Because he was an ex-Guantanamo inmate and had no passport, he could not travel on commercial airlines, so the Australian government had chartered a business jet. Margulies appeared down the stairs and so did the Australian official, to whom Habib had taken an intense dislike. The man produced a document and Habib wasn't allowed to have the cable ties cut from his hands until he signed it, which his lawyer advised him to do. He believed it was to indemnify the Australian government against any suggestion of mistreatment on the trip.

The official then gave him US $200 and some change in Emirati and Singaporean currency, telling him this was what he had been carrying when he was arrested. His passport, watch, Ray-Ban sunglasses and luggage weren't returned. (Habib was eventually re-issued with a passport in 2011.)

An official from the Attorney-General's Department was there too, along with two security guards. They would all make the trip to Australia, with a quick refuelling stop in Tahiti, together.

For Habib, the salubrious interior of the private jet was an incomprehensible contrast with where he had just been. Suddenly, he was in an armchair-style leather seat in a plane that 'looked like a two-bedroom house'. 'I couldn't find the toilet,' he said.

The practicalities of the long trip had presented a dilemma for the Attorney-General's Department. What to do about in-flight entertainment for someone who had been locked up for nearly four years? While the two Australian officials sat in a private cabin up front, Habib, his lawyer and the two security guards sat down the back. Habib couldn't sleep, which made the weary guards nervous. Again, Margulies was incredulous. 'What's wrong with you?' he asked. 'You haven't been asleep for years!'

Habib didn't know. It was all just too much. In the end, he passed some of the time watching one of the movies the department had selected for him: Brad Pitt, Orlando Bloom, Peter O'Toole and Australians Eric Bana and Rose Byrne in the newish-release ancient Greek drama, *Troy*. It had been nominated for an Oscar for its costumes. He thought it wasn't bad.

Once back in Australia, Habib took legal action against the federal government over his incarceration. The case was settled for an undisclosed sum in December 2010.

In early 2011, Prime Minister Julia Gillard asked the Inspector General of Intelligence and Security to investigate Habib's allegations that Australians were involved in rendering him to Egypt. John Howard denies any involvement in or contemporary knowledge of Habib's rendition:

> At no stage did I or would I give any authority for the rendition of Australian citizens and I can't believe any member of my government would have. And I'm certainly not aware that any of them did and I have no knowledge of any Australian carrying any authority of the Australian government being involved either.

But Hicks' case was more problematic for the government. His savvy Defense-appointed military defender, Major Michael Mori, travelled to Australia and talked up the delay in trying his client as a travesty of justice. Mori was articulate and persuasive, and public sympathy for Hicks increased. Hicks also alleged he was mistreated. He said that, at Guantanamo Bay, he was beaten while blindfolded and handcuffed and also deprived of sleep.

The government was accused of abandoning an Australian citizen, but it continued to believe Hicks was 'the most highly trained white person al Qaeda ever had'. The government did not share the views of some that he was an innocent abroad. But the swelling public opinion heading towards the end of 2007 became a domestic political problem. The protests to the Americans increased: Hicks' case must be expedited—America's ally needed it to be done.

David Hicks would eventually become the first detainee to appear before a reconstituted military commission. Under a deal with prosecutors, he pleaded guilty and was returned to Australia in 2007, ahead of the federal

election. He was subject to a control order which prevented him from any public commentary until the following year—after the election was over.

*

Before the Guantanamo issues were resolved, concerns about terrorism were driven home again in vivid fashion. This time it was Madrid. On 11 March 2004, a series of coordinated bombings on the Spanish rail system killed 191 people and injured another 1800. The Spanish elections were only three days away. With Australia facing its own federal election later in the year, the timing was chilling. The last thing the Australian government wanted was anyone drawing any link between the Spanish bombings and that country's Iraq involvement, especially on the eve of an election.

From the Prime Minister down, ministers insisted the Madrid bombing had nothing to do with the fact that Spain, like Australia, had been a key ally of the US in Iraq. To suggest that it did would have obvious implications. Howard issued a statement saying he had asked the government's National Counter-Terrorism Committee to meet to discuss the bombings:

> Clearly, the terrorist attack in Madrid highlights the worldwide threat of terrorism and our ongoing need for vigilance. In the last twelve months alone, there have been terrorist attacks in a number of countries including Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Turkey and now Spain. It is a reminder that no country is free from risk.

Howard and his senior staff were more than dismayed when, in a Sunday morning television interview on 14 March with Channel Nine's Jana Wendt, AFP Commissioner Mick Keelty canvassed the possibility of a link between the Spanish bombings and the war in Iraq. He had anticipated being asked about a link. His instinct told him that there could be a

connection and others in the security community thought so, too. If he was asked, he decided that's what he would say.

Wendt asked Keelty if such an attack could happen in Australia. He responded:

> The reality is, if this turns out to be Islamic extremists responsible for this bombing in Spain, it's more likely to be linked to the position that Spain and other allies took on issues such as Iraq. And I don't think anyone's been hiding the fact that we do believe that ultimately one day, whether it be in one month's time, one year's time, or ten years' time, something will happen.

Keelty was satisfied with his answer. He hadn't said the bombings were definitely linked to Iraq. For all they knew then, it could still be the Basque separatist group, ETA, so 'if' was a qualifier. But he had left open the possibility because he considered that was the truth, no matter what others might try to suggest.

Keelty wasn't the only member of a security agency to draw links between Australia's military associations and being a terrorism target. Seven months earlier, in a speech to the Pan-Pacific Newspaper Conference in Brisbane, ASIO chief Dennis Richardson had directly suggested Australia's role alongside the United States was a risk factor. 'The fact that we are in close alliance with the US, and the fact that we were early and actively engaged in the war on terrorism does contribute to us being a target,' Richardson had said.

But on this later occasion, the government was not happy. As soon as he was off air and back in Channel Nine's green room—the holding room for guests—Keelty's mobile phone was ringing. It was Howard's chief of staff, Arthur Sinodinos. Sinodinos had already called the Prime Minister at his Sydney residence, Kirribilli House, to discuss what Keelty had said, and Howard had asked him to give Keelty a ring.

‘It wasn’t a matter of issuing instructions,’ Sinodinos said of the conversation. The commissioner neither defended his remarks nor said he had made a mistake, but he agreed to clarify them. As details of the call to Keelty leaked, the media portrayed it as political interference—the Prime Minister’s office giving the police chief a bollocking for messing up its message. It wasn’t a good look.

The Spanish election was being held the same day. The fact that the Socialist Opposition, which had not supported the Iraq commitment, trounced Jose Maria Aznar’s conservative party only raised the stakes.

On Monday, 15 March, journalists asked John Howard if Keelty’s analysis was wrong. ‘Well the answer, as I recall it, was hypothetical, but in any event it is not a conclusion I would have reached,’ he said. Asked if he had any concerns about Keelty or his position, Howard replied, ‘No.’ In the wake of the Spanish election, did Howard think Australia’s role in Iraq might affect his chances at the ballot box? ‘Well I think it’s drawing a pretty long bow to start comparing what happened in Spain to what might happen at the end of this year,’ he said. ‘I would have thought that there were a lot of factors at play in Spain.’ The Prime Minister said he had heard radio reports suggesting opinion polls had predicted a Socialist resurgence before the bombings: ‘So I think people ought to take a bit of a cold shower on that and not get too excited.’

But with the police chief seemingly contradicting the government, there was a great deal of excitement.

*

On 16 March, after two days feeling the blowtorch, Keelty issued a statement saying his remarks had been ‘taken out of context’. Under the Howard government, that was a phrase commonly used when someone was being made to fix up a political mess. As usual, it raised eyebrows. There was no contextual confusion here. Keelty had simply said something the government didn’t want him to say.

The US government hadn't wanted him to say it, either. 'I think it is very important that Spain stay engaged and that the terrorists not be made to feel they have won a victory here,' US ambassador Tom Schieffer told *The Age* the same day. 'That could have serious consequences for all of us.'

The consequences for Keelty weren't pleasant. It was a very tense few days and the atmosphere was crackling. Reporting on it at the time, I had the distinct sense that all the protests over what Keelty had said were not because his facts were wrong, but because stating them out loud could potentially endanger not the Australian people but the Australian government.

Keelty's good friend, ASIO chief Dennis Richardson, was bailed up by journalists after giving a speech on 16 March. He was asked about a new tape, purporting to be from al Qaeda, claiming responsibility for the Spanish bombings and linking them to the war in Iraq. 'I think it's a lot more than the tape that, at this point, would appear to point in the direction of al Qaeda,' Richardson said. He didn't know if the tape was authentic or not.

His remarks were interpreted as casting doubt on an Iraq link and walking away from Keelty. In fact, he did neither. Richardson said he had 'the utmost personal respect' for the police chief. On the broader issue of Iraq, he chose his words carefully: 'The fact that the threat level against Australian interests overseas was raised because of Iraq was publicly stated by the Prime Minister in answer to a question in the Parliament, on the 24th of March last year. It's hardly new.'

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer was less circumspect. He suggested Keelty was siding with the enemy: 'He's just expressing a view which reflects a lot of the propaganda we're getting from al Qaeda,' Downer said. Feeling like he had gone too far, he later rang Keelty to apologise and made a second statement that night, retreating from his remarks.

But another official who disagreed with Keelty did not retreat. Two days after the original interview—and the same day as Keelty's 'clarifying' statement—Defence Force chief Peter Cosgrove joined Minister Robert Hill

at a news conference to announce the relocation of Defence's national command headquarters. Cosgrove was asked if being involved in Iraq put Australia at greater risk. He had thought about what he would say and gave Keelty a whack. 'I generally agree with Mick Keelty. He's doing a fantastic job,' Cosgrove said. 'I see the same intelligence as he's seeing and I disagree with him on this occasion.'

In his memoirs, Cosgrove rejected suggestions that he should not have spoken out.

> Some people took the view that as a senior official I had no place in commenting upon what another senior official had said. This is a double standard. If Mick had the right to comment publicly on the issue in the first place, then I also had the same right.

Cosgrove's intervention was a rare public rebuke from one senior official to another. Keelty was later invited to dinner at the Lodge and the whole incident was officially put to rest. But it was never put to rest between Keelty and Cosgrove. While they continued to work professionally, the personal relationship between the two men would never recover.

Some time later, a senior minister told a senior official privately that he thought most of his colleagues had agreed with what Keelty had said in the original interview. 'But we are cowards,' the minister said.

10

OUT BY CHRISTMAS

WAR TAKES A TOLL beyond where it is fought.

In Australia, during 2003 and 2004, it took a toll on the Opposition. Simon Crean had been Labor leader since Kim Beazley stood down after the ALP's thumping at the 2001 election. Crean had been trying to prosecute the case against war in Iraq while still declaring Labor's support for the troops themselves. It was not an easy line to walk.

On 20 March 2003, Crean gave an address to the National Press Club. There was no missing his theme:

> As I speak, we are a nation on the brink of war, a war we should not be in. A war to which 2000 of our fighting men and women were committed many months ago but were told about last Tuesday. A war to which we are one of only four countries prepared to join the US in putting troops on the ground, despite claims of a coalition of up to thirty. A war which, for the first time in our history, Australia has joined as an aggressor—not because we are directly threatened, not because the UN has determined it, but because the US asked us to.

Crean argued that the Iraqi regime had to be disarmed, 'but this is not the way'. He had been arguing this for months. His colleagues supported the case but not the way it was being prosecuted and his leadership was under immense pressure. The likeable, reasonable, former ACTU president was not cutting through with the voting public.

By June 2003, Crean would face a leadership challenge from a rejuvenated Beazley, who had tried twice already to unseat John Howard.

On this occasion, the incumbent would hold his ground, but only for six months.

In his Press Club address, Crean was pushing Labor's opposition to the war—hard. He drew parallels with Vietnam, recalling that soldiers returning from that conflict became pariahs because of the depth of public anger at the war itself. He based his argument on the fact that there had been no explicit UN resolution authorising the Iraq intervention: a resolution which the government had initially made a condition of Australia's participation but which insistence later fell by the wayside. And he presented Labor-commissioned legal advice which said that attacking Iraq would contravene international law. He said:

> If the 21st century is to be a world where what is right and what is wrong, and who is to have weapons of mass destruction and who is to keep them is determined by the great and powerful, a medium-sized power like Australia must ultimately be the loser.

Crean seized on remarks made in Parliament two nights earlier by the manager of government business and leader of the House, Tony Abbott. 'We would be foolish not to admit that the risks of going to war in Iraq are frightening,' Abbott had declared, risking reopening a thorny debate. Abbott listed among them the risk of heavy casualties, both military and civilian, the prospect that Australia and its allies would be labelled anti-Muslim and 'the enormous cost of reconstruction'.

'Then, Mr Speaker, there is the increased risk of terrorist attack here in Australia,' he said. Then, quickly clarifying: 'Although it's important to point out that we have long been on the terrorist radar screen …' As the Opposition leader completed his presentation, word came through that the bombing had begun.

Crean responded:

> Well, this is a sad day, a sad day for the world. It's a tragic day for Australia. We are now involved in a conflict that we should never have been in, and we are going to become a target as a consequence of it. This is a reckless, dangerous act, and the Prime Minister should be hanging his head in shame as a result of that.

*

Just as it had been in Afghanistan, the initial combat phase of the Iraq War was remarkably short. Within weeks, the US government became convinced that, once again, it had achieved its objective. On May 1, President Bush gave a televised address from the deck of the American aircraft carrier, the USS *Abraham Lincoln*, off the coast of California. Behind him hung a banner which read: 'Mission Accomplished'.

> In the Battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed … This nation thanks all of the members of our coalition who joined in a noble cause. We thank the Armed Forces of the United Kingdom, Australia, and Poland, who shared in the hardships of war.

Over the months which followed, as the insurgency rose, Bush would come under attack for making false imperialist assumptions.

Three days later, Bush showed his appreciation to Australia in person. John Howard and his wife, Janette, joined Bush and his wife, Laura, for a night on their ranch in Crawford, Texas. Bush told journalists:

> The Prime Minister is not only a man of steel, he's showed the world he's a man of heart … He's steady. It gets tough when you make tough decisions and we both made the tough decisions but there was never any doubt in his mind. He was steady under fire.

*

Back home, the Labor Opposition was preoccupied with its own problems. After months of simmering leadership tension, Beazley mounted an unsuccessful challenge to Crean on 16 June. Two days later, the Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery staged its annual midwinter ball with Parliament House's Great Hall decked out like a big top; bread and circuses and a high-wire—the metaphors were many. The press gallery's a'capella parodists, the House Howlers, sang (with apologies to Gloria Gaynor) about the victorious Simon Crean in *Simon's Survival Song.*

As the vote had been sprung just two days before the ball, we Howlers had prepared an alternative parody in case Beazley defied predictions and won. In the end we were a bit relieved: the Beazley ditty wasn't as good and, unlike the man for whom it was penned, was never heard of again.

The Labor folks wandering the room wanted to believe a swelling boil had been lanced. Along with the clowns and acrobats, the Iraq War actually brought some relief to the atmosphere. We were able to say more with satire than we could playing it straight. As usual, guest of honour John Howard—who was generally a pretty good sport at these events—remained poker-faced throughout.

*

Both Australians and Americans were getting the picture about the war. It had sprung from a failure of intelligence, or at least the misinterpretation of it. Debate would rage for years over whether, in the US, it was inadvertent or wilful.

In June 2003, the US Congress' Select Committee on Intelligence began an inquiry. The next month, the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, addressed a joint meeting of the houses of Congress in Washington. 'Can we be sure that terrorism and weapons of mass destruction will join

together?’ Blair asked, wondering rhetorically about the rightness of what they had done and were still doing.

> Let us say one thing: If we are wrong, we will have destroyed a threat that, at its least, is responsible for inhuman carnage and suffering. That is something I am confident history will forgive. But if our critics are wrong, if we are right, as I believe with every fibre of instinct and conviction I have that we are, and we do not act, then we will have hesitated in the face of this menace when we should have given leadership. That is something history will not forgive.

*

It was the season for addresses to joint parliamentary meetings. In October 2003, President Bush addressed the combined Australian House of Representatives and Senate, in return for the courtesy extended to John Howard the previous year. The Chinese President, Hu Jintao, was to be in Australia on an overlapping visit and Howard also extended an invitation to him. The addresses were held on consecutive days.

The Opposition supported both invitations. But for the Greens, who had one MP and two senators, this amounted to foreigners subjugating Australia’s Parliament. Greens’ party leader Senator Bob Brown, fellow Senator Kerry Nettle and MP Michael Organ had issues with both visiting leaders. They were particularly unhappy about the treatment of the Australian Guantanamo Bay detainees, David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib. And they weren’t terribly keen on China’s treatment of Tibet, either.

On the day of Bush’s speech, 23 October, the three gave their allocated guest seats in the public gallery to Hicks’ civilian lawyer, Stephen Kenny, and Mamdouh Habib’s wife, Maha, and their teenage son, Ahmed. Habib was then still incarcerated and Maha Habib had written a letter to Bush,

pleading for her husband's release, which the Greens planned to try to hand to him.

For the Hu speech, their seats went to Sydney-based Chinese democracy advocate Chin Jin, and two Canberra-based Tibetans, Dhondup Phun Tsok and Tsering Deki Tshoko.

But it wasn't the guests who made the headlines. As Bush spoke about the war in Iraq, Brown stood up. 'Mr Bush,' he called out. 'This is Australia. Respect our nation. Return our Australians from Guantanamo Bay. Respect the laws of the world and the world will respect you.'

He was met with howls of protest from both sides of the chamber. The Speaker, Neil Andrew, ordered that Brown be removed. He refused to go because the rules said only a vote of the Senate could remove a senator from a joint sitting. The Serjeant-at-Arms backed off. Ahmed Habib was thrown out of the public gallery after he leapt up and called out demanding justice for his father.

As Bush's speech resumed and he talked about security in the Asia-Pacific region, Brown called out once more, this time from his seat. 'But we are not a sheriff!' When Bush went on to talk about free trade, Kerry Nettle jumped up, urging him not to bully Australia. As the House erupted again, Bush said, 'I love free speech'. The shouting turned to applause. Brown and Nettle were banned from the next day's sitting.

For the Chinese speech, their invited guests were moved to the upstairs student galleries, behind glass. Greens MP Michael Organ attended, wearing a Tibetan flag on his lapel and refused to join the standing ovation.

But it was the previous day's protests which gained most notoriety. Brown and Nettle were jostled at the back of the chamber after the Bush speech, but Brown still managed to grasp the President's hand.

Bush also shook hands all along the front benches on both sides of the chamber.

*

Despite all the controversy—or perhaps because of it—hosting a pair of presidents didn't hurt John Howard's public standing. But it didn't do anything much for the Opposition, especially the beleaguered Simon Crean. On 27 November 2003, Crean's closest supporters told him he should stand down. He resigned the next day—the first Labor leader not afforded the right to contest an election. Beazley immediately nominated to replace him and by the time of the ballot on 2 December, so had fellow frontbencher Mark Latham.

Latham had gained a reputation as brash and thuggish, as well as smart and unpredictable. Outside Parliament he had accidentally broken an uncooperative taxi driver's arm. Inside, he had lambasted John Howard as an 'arselicker' for his relationship with the President and described Bush himself as 'the most incompetent and dangerous president in living memory'. Holding former prime minister Gough Whitlam's old seat of Werriwa, Latham had defended Crean against his Labor detractors until he believed he was no longer defensible. Then he threw his proverbial hat in against the man most people had expected to take over.

The ballot was called just days before the Prime Minister was due to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, a world away, in Nigeria. A number of us in the press gallery were due to go, too. In order to avoid airlines with dubious safety records, I was booked to fly via London. Unlike some of my colleagues, I wasn't able to change my flights at short notice and had to leave the country the night before the Labor ballot. Mid-air out of Singapore as it was taking place, I persuaded the flight attendant —as it turned out, a former journalist—to ask the pilot to radio back to find out who had won. He returned and tried to make me play guessing games over what turned out to be a pretty good secret. Eventually, he caved. 'Latham, by two.'

It was a stunning result. Labor had embarked on what *The Economist* magazine would describe a few days later as possibly its 'most daring, or dangerous experiment' in recent history. And here I was, halfway to Africa. For many hours over the ocean, I wondered what it would mean. When

Howard arrived in Abuja the next day, he was wondering the same thing. The Prime Minister appeared tetchy and on edge. He had not been expecting this and now he was in Nigeria while the new Opposition leader was capturing national headlines at home.

But not all of the headlines were good. Two days after he won the ballot, Latham and his shadow foreign minister, Kevin Rudd, held talks with the US ambassador, Tom Schieffer. Afterwards, Latham and Rudd called a news conference. Schieffer wasn't there but an apparently enthusiastic Labor staffer positioned a pair of flags—one Australian and one, strangely, American—as the backdrop.

Howard thought the gesture bizarre. He wasn't alone. 'A press conference displaying the flag of a foreign country when there's no representative of that foreign country present is inept tokenism,' the Prime Minister said at his own press conference at the Australian embassy in Abuja.

Back in Australia, Latham had been asked if he had apologised to the ambassador for his remarks about the US President. 'No,' he'd replied. 'We are looking to the future, not the past. I have explained the context of those remarks and we've had a discussion, if you like, to clear the air.'

'Can I say, that is just pathetic,' Howard responded. He questioned Latham's maturity:

> I mean this happened only a few months ago and he repeated his words … a couple of days ago. I mean come on, we're in the big school now and you can't say, 'Oh yes, I might have done that but, I mean, forget about that and we're starting all over again …' It's not quite as easy as that. I certainly sort of haven't found it quite as easy as that over the years, and you know I don't know that anybody else should.

Towards the end of Latham's news conference, the questioning had turned to Rudd. How did he feel, given that his new leader had once called

him ‘a knucklehead’?

‘It’s a term of embrace,’ Rudd said.

Latham chimed in. ‘I come from a culture where taking the mickey and having a go is part of the fun,’ he added.

‘So what do you reckon, Mr Rudd?’ journalist Annabel Crabb asked. ‘Friends?’

Rudd explained that he and Latham had spent an hour the previous day ‘chewing the fat’ and discussing the past. ‘I am looking forward to working under Mark’s leadership,’ he said.

They couldn’t stand each other.

*

Rudd and Latham had, to put it mildly, different ideas on policy. They did, however, agree on Labor’s opposition to the Iraq War, and Rudd had begun to highlight Australia’s absence from Afghanistan in contrast. He drew attention to a letter from the Afghan government which had been delivered to the Australian government in late 2002, urging Australia not to withdraw.

The then Afghan ambassador Mahmoud Saikal had confirmed his government’s request on ABC radio in December 2003:

> I wrote a letter to the Prime Minister myself, upon the instruction I received from my government, requesting the continuation of military assistance to Afghanistan, if not in the form of the SAS forces, but in a current form that could match the current phase of the campaign against terrorism inside Afghanistan … That did receive some consideration. In May this year we were told that Australia was ready to send a small team to explore ways and means of assisting Afghanistan, but that team has not gone to Afghanistan yet.

No team went in 2003; nor in 2004. Rudd wanted Labor to openly advocate for troops to be sent back. Latham would not agree. In March, Rudd decided to go to Afghanistan himself. The government would not endorse his trip and provided no assistance. Rudd invited a colleague, Victorian MP Alan Griffin, to go with him. Griffin had a sizeable Afghan community in his outer Melbourne electorate and the two men had discussed the situation in the troubled country more than once.

They arranged the trip as a study tour under their allotted parliamentary travel budgets and took a Singapore Airlines flight from Sydney. As they settled into their seats, Rudd told Griffin a story. A week or so earlier, Rudd had received a phone call from Latham. The leader told him he had decided it was time Labor was more decisive in its opposition to the Iraq military commitment. He thought they should nominate a date to pull the troops out. Rudd thought this was not a good idea. You can't name a date, he said. It will have consequences on the ground. You need to negotiate with the allies and do it gradually.

Latham had listened to the argument and said he would think about it. The next day, he rang Rudd again and said he had decided to drop it. Rudd and Griffin were relieved that Latham had been dissuaded.

They were away five days and the trip coincided with the first anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. Before they flew home again, Rudd gave an interview to ABC radio's *PM* program: 'Front and centre for Australia's national security, is the war against terrorism,' Rudd said. 'Iraq represented a fundamental diversion from that challenge. The war against terrorism still continues here in Afghanistan where we continue to have al Qaeda operating in the country, and just across the border in [Pakistan].'

A couple of days after arriving home, Kevin Rudd missed a call from Latham. 'Oh, g'day Kevin, it's Mark here,' the message on his mobile phone voicemail began. Latham said the Iraq issue was getting harder and that Labor needed to draw a line. He thought Christmas was about the right time to withdraw. Got any problems, he said, let us know later on. 'See ya.'

Rudd rang back and left Latham a message outlining why he still thought it was not a good idea.

If his leader got the message, he didn't take the advice. On Tuesday, 23 March, Latham was interviewed on Sydney radio 2UE. The pronouncement he made was described later as spontaneous, but it wasn't. Presenter Mike Carlton asked about the then tentative timetable to hand power to a new sovereign Iraqi government around June. Latham said he hoped Australian troops' responsibilities there would then be over. 'If a federal election is held this year, say the election was in September and there was a change in government, we would be hoping to have them back by Christmas, certainly,' he said.

In his controversial *Latham Diaries*, published in 2005, Mark Latham's entry for 23 March was focussed entirely on missing his family. It made no mention of his policy pronouncement, only that he had told his assistant to clear his diary, and had driven home to Sydney, straight after Question Time, in the middle of a parliamentary week.

He returned the next day, to find his adviser, Michael Cooney, brawling with his shadow foreign affairs minister. Rudd did not like what Latham had done. Latham thought Rudd's position had been 'wishy-washy'. 'So I overruled him,' Latham wrote. 'I've had a firm position on every other issue and it's worked for me; why not this one?'

The published opinion polls were showing Labor in an election-winning position and Latham was gaining in confidence. But newspapers started reporting a 'split' in Labor ranks over Iraq. He blamed Rudd.

In April, Latham set a trap for Rudd who he suspected of leaking to Channel Nine's Laurie Oakes. He told Rudd about Labor Party research on Iraq involving focus groups, when no such research existed. The next edition of *The Bulletin* magazine, in which Oakes had a column, referred to focus group research. 'Trapped him,' wrote Latham in his *Diaries*, describing how he planned to make Rudd minister for the Pacific Islands if they won the election. 'Rudd is a terrible piece of work,' Latham wrote.

‘Addicted to the media and leaking. A junior minister in government at best.’

*

Like others of his colleagues, Rudd had taken to the airwaves to defend Latham’s new policy. A week after it was announced, he appeared on ABC TV’s *Lateline* program. Host Tony Jones asked the shadow foreign minister if he had known in advance that Latham would promise to pull the troops ‘out by Christmas’. ‘We’d been discussing it for some time,’ Rudd said obtusely.

Jones accused Rudd of having actually called for a troop increase in Iraq in a letter he had written to the government the previous November. In a tense and tortuous exchange, Rudd acknowledged that he had advocated more trainers but insisted he had asked that they come from within existing troop numbers. He didn’t acknowledge that his position contradicted the one he was now forced to espouse. But it did.

Jones also asked Rudd if he supported sending more troops to Afghanistan. ‘Afghanistan is still the front-line,’ Rudd said. ‘It’s an unresolved war.’

Jones pressed. ‘A very quick yes or no answer: would a Labor government contemplate sending Australian troops to Afghanistan?’

‘Our priorities at this stage, as far as the war against terrorism is concerned, [are] in our own region, our own neighbourhood and backyard,’ Rudd replied. ‘As far as any proposal we would receive on that score, well, we’d consider it in due course.’ The short answer was yes. But he didn’t say so.

*

In early June, Prime Minister John Howard went back to Washington. These prime ministerial visits to the US were becoming so regular that my

New York friends—and their friends—had started making jokes about every change of season heralding my imminent arrival.

On 3 June, in the White House Rose Garden, Howard and President Bush addressed the media on their meeting, just held, before taking the usual two questions from either side. ‘I will never forget standing with the Prime Minister on September 10th, 2001, the day before the world changed forever,’ Bush said. ‘Today Australians and Americans are standing together on the frontlines of freedom.’

John Howard echoed the sentiment:

> You reminded me, Mr President, that the first occasion on which we met in our respective positions was indeed the 10th of September 2001, at the Naval Dockyard, not far from here, and then we later continued our discussions at the White House. Since then, we have worked together not only as leaders of two countries that share the values of democracy, share the values of aspirational people, who believe in economic achievement and individual liberty, but we’ve also worked together very closely in the war against terror.

Both men acknowledged the difficult turn things were taking in Iraq. Howard said:

> In recent weeks, the news out of Iraq has not been as positive as we would have liked. And the reasons for that are understood but that has not altered Australia’s view. We will keep a presence in Iraq … This is not a time, it is the worst time imaginable for allies to be showing any weakness in relation to the pursuit of our goals in Iraq. And I express my strong support for the leadership that the President has continued to display, particularly through some of the more difficult aspects of recent weeks.

President Bush was asked about the CIA leak investigation, and when the Australian Guantanamo detainees, David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib, would face trial. He offered assurances of fair treatment.

The last question was to come from *The Australian*'s Steve Lewis, who was positioned at the far end of a long stretch of reporters standing three deep. Lewis hesitated. When an American journalist tried to steal a march and was told it was an Australian's turn, Howard called on the Australian reporter by name. 'Where are you?' the President asked, looking up and down.

'Just here, thank you,' Lewis replied, addressing his question to Bush:

> Mr Howard and yourself reaffirmed the commitment that Australia and the US have to stay the course in Iraq, but you would be aware the alternative Prime Minister in Australia, Mark Latham, has promised to withdraw Australian troops from Iraq by Christmas if he wins the election. What signal would that send to the Iraqi people, and the other members of the coalition of the willing?

Bush was clearly aware of Latham's position. Having been on the receiving end of Latham's volleys across the Pacific, he had no hesitation in returning serve:

> I think that would be disastrous. It would be a disastrous decision for the leader of a great country like Australia to say that we're pulling out. It would dispirit those who love freedom in Iraq; it would say that the Australian government doesn't see the hope of a free and democratic society leading to a peaceful world. It would embolden the enemy, who believe that they can shake our will. See, they want to kill innocent life, because they think that the western world, and the free world is weak—that when times

> get tough, we will shirk our duty to those who long for freedom, and we'll leave. And I, anyway …

Bush's voice trailed off. Someone tried to ask another question, but he brushed it aside: 'Thank you all very much for coming.'

Back in Australia, conspiracy theories abounded. Some, including Latham, thought it was a set-up question enabling Bush to attack Latham and Labor from far away, with Howard pre-informed, or maybe even responsible.

It wasn't. I was there when we decided among the group of reporters what to ask and who would ask it. Howard's media adviser had been told who would ask questions but not what they would say. With the government advocating staying in Iraq and the Opposition advocating going—and an Australian election due at the end of the year—it seemed fair to ask the chief ally what he thought, and to see whether he was willing to buy into domestic politics.

The answer was a pretty clear message from Bush to the bloke who'd been having a go: expect to cop it back. As Latham himself put it later, it was '15 all'.

Nevertheless, he issued a statement standing his ground. He had been taught to stand up to powerful people. Latham wrote in his *Diaries*:

> When I said I was anti-Establishment, I meant it. It's not just a political ethos, it's in my blood, a way of life. If it's still the Australian way, I will win the election. If not, what the people are saying is that they don't mind being an American colony under Howard. That's a nation not worth leading.

Six days later, Howard was back in Australia and visiting the SAS barracks at Swanbourne, in Perth, to witness the squadron returned from Iraq receiving a unit citation for gallantry. Afterwards, a journalist asked about the wording of the citation. 'Prime Minister, the official notes on this

say that the outstanding [act of] gallantry [was] to deny the Iraqi forces the ability to employ weapons of mass destruction. Given that there hasn't been any found, doesn't that take the gloss off a little bit?'

'No it doesn't,' the Prime Minister replied. 'Because the military operations that they were charged with, they carried out with very great distinction.'

Governor-General Michael Jeffery, a former member of the SAS, had presented the awards. In his remarks, Jeffery had referred to Latham's withdrawal policy and did not agree with it. Outside, Howard was asked about Jeffrey's comments. 'Look I don't think he was endeavouring in any way to interfere in domestic politics,' Howard said. 'He's doing a very good job and he's a scrupulously apolitical governor-general.'

The Prime Minister's defence of Jeffery prompted me to recall a conversation I'd had with a senior government official the previous year, when controversial Anglican archbishop Peter Hollingworth had resigned the vice-regal post and the government was looking for a replacement. I was still working for *The West Australian* and my money was on the former WA governor and decorated soldier, Michael Jeffery. The background conversation I was having with the official was making me think I was on the right track. He wouldn't confirm it. But he wouldn't deny it either.

Pushing on, I asked him if, hypothetically, the government might be attracted to a military man. The answer was yes. Because they understand hierarchy, the official said. 'And they know how to take orders.'

*

By July of 2004, the polls had swung around again and Latham's Labor was in trouble. The party was taking a beating after a blast of what Latham felt was highly unfair publicity, for which he blamed his ex-wife, about his own past personal behaviour. There were also public doubts emerging about Labor's security credentials in the wake of his 'troops out' pledge.

The man Latham had defeated, Kim Beazley, had watched the aftermath of the surprise policy announcement from his home in Perth. A few days before Latham's now-infamous radio interview, Beazley, then a backbencher, had been diagnosed with an illness known as Schaltenbrand's syndrome. He had been feeling unwell, and an MRI scan showed a leak of cerebrospinal fluid from around the brain. The only remedy was several weeks of rest. It gave him a different perspective on his party's situation—viewed through the newspapers and television screens like other voters—and plenty of time to think. He believed Latham was on the right general track in opposing the Iraq commitment. But, like Rudd, Beazley thought the Christmas promise was heavy-handed and needed adjustment. *You can't sit around anymore,* he told himself. *Get off your arse and do something.*

Over the weeks that followed the late-March Latham pronouncement, Beazley spoke to Latham's advisers and confidantes. He rang the leader's numbers man, the member for the Sydney-based safe Labor seat of Kingsford Smith, Laurie Brereton, and suggested he might return to the front bench to help with the message on security.

Labor polling continued to show Beazley was popular. The party's national secretary, Tim Gartrell, was telling Latham that he needed some kind of circuit-breaker. It started to sound like a good idea. But Beazley placed one condition on his return: Latham had to gently re-position on the Iraq withdrawal. Beazley would write him a speech on security policy which would contain such a repositioning. And Latham could deliver it. Latham agreed.

In the meantime, the Opposition leader was sketching out a front-bench reshuffle. Brereton was planning to retire, and Labor had performed a major coup by recruiting a rock star, Midnight Oil frontman Peter Garrett, to run in Kingsford Smith. It was a chance to rearrange a few faces. And he would bring Beazley back in the Defence portfolio.

If Latham and Rudd weren't exactly bosom buddies, Latham and Beazley weren't much closer. This was a relationship of necessity, as the pre-election posters showing Latham and Beazley sitting poring over

documents together proved. Latham's adviser, Michael Cooney, re-worded some of the speech Beazley provided but the content remained. The day he unveiled his new front bench, Latham delivered it at the Australian Institute of International Affairs. Beazley was with him. He argued that the interests of Australia's ally, the US, had not been advanced in Iraq:

> Our opponents in the war on terror see nothing but gains. Yet from Australia there has been neither warning nor argument, just passive acceptance. The bigger issue is this: the government's failure to influence the course of events in Iraq, both during and after the initial conflict, and to prevent significant harm to our ally's standing. This is the real cost of Iraq to the free world.
>
> Labor has always believed that Australia's military commitments should be time-limited when they are undertaken in regions where Australia does not have strong permanent interests. This was the case in Afghanistan. A Labor government will withdraw the Australian troops operating in Iraq under Operation Catalyst by the end of 2004.

But there were the agreed qualifications. Labor would 'follow appropriate advice' and leave forces in place to guard the Australian diplomatic mission in Baghdad. And it would dedicate millions of dollars to rebuilding Iraqi services and infrastructure.

Just over a month later, John Howard called the 2004 election. The tumult of the past three years, with public anger over the war in Iraq and an inquiry into the 2001 'children overboard' affair, had given rise to much debate about whether this was an honest government. So Howard's opening salvo was audacious: 'This election will be about trust.'

Latham responded that 'people don't trust this government anymore'. But Howard proceeded to frame the word 'trust' as being, not about honesty, but something else: reliability and security, both physical and financial.

In its second week, security issues overwhelmed the campaign. On 9 September, a bomb exploded outside Australia's embassy in Jakarta, killing nine people—all Indonesians—including some embassy staff. It was not clear whether the attack was timed to disrupt the Australian election campaign or the first round of Indonesian presidential elections, which was just beginning. It was also just two days before the third anniversary of the September 11 attacks on the US.

Howard was in Melbourne when the attack happened at 10.15 am, local time. He expressed 'utter dismay'. In a television interview with the Seven Network, he was asked if it could be linked to Australia's involvement in Iraq. Howard replied:

> I don't want to get into that sort of thing except to say that this country will never have its position on issues like that dictated by terrorism. And the day any country surrenders decisions on those things to the dictates of barbarism and terrorism is the day a country loses control over its future.

Latham, who was in Cairns, was briefed on the attack. He condemned it as 'appalling'. 'We need to deal with the consequences as best we can and most importantly bring those responsible for this evil and barbaric act, bring the terrorists responsible to justice as quickly as possible,' he said.

By agreement, both leaders halted their campaigns for the next day, 10 September, out of respect for the victims. They had already agreed to do the same the day after that.

Howard campaigned on fighting terrorism and on keeping interest rates low—the two sides to his security theme.

Latham tried to drag the issues onto Labor's ground, but a promise to cut funding to private schools attracted accusations of class warfare. One mid-campaign Sunday in Darwin, the pressure began to show. Latham held a morning news conference on the foreshore. It was hot and horribly humid, the period Darwinians call the 'build-up', and whoever had organised the

location—known in politics as ‘advancing’—had not thought things through. Latham was standing in the full sun. It didn’t help what happened next.

Journalist Samantha Maiden asked Latham a series of questions about his own children’s childcare arrangements, which involved a non-government provider, and whether this made his schools policy a bit hypocritical. He became very agitated and was no calmer by the time we arrived at the next event—a picture opportunity with some defence hardware inside a big hangar.

Afterwards, as we were piling back onto the bus, one of Latham’s advisers came and called me aside. I had become press gallery president earlier in the year and apparently, Latham wanted to talk to me in that capacity. I was led through the hangar past all the television crews who, sensing an impending Latham incident, dutifully buttoned their cameras on. We went through a door, which was mercifully closed behind us, to a room out back where the unhappy Latham was waiting. As staff and Labor MPs stood a few feet away trying to pretend it wasn’t happening, Latham bailed me up behind the door and begged me to ‘discipline’ Maiden.

I explained I wasn’t the press gallery policewoman and that, like me, she was a journalist. Asking questions was our job. I told him I would report the gist of our conversation to my colleagues, given I’d been called in as their representative. At the end of it, I felt a bit sorry for him. He didn’t seem well suited to the job he was seeking and I sensed his heart wasn’t really in it. I ran the gauntlet of the cameras again and returned to the bus to explain his request and my response to Maiden and the others. The bizarre episode ended up in the newspapers. It was a fair sign all was not going well.

That was reaffirmed on 8 October, the last day of the campaign, when Latham and Howard crossed paths in a Sydney radio studio and Latham almost wrenched the Prime Minister’s arm off in a handshake. The television images seemed to reinforce public hesitations about Latham. The next day, Howard won the election.

In January 2005, after Latham refused to interrupt his holiday to respond to the Asian tsunami, the anger with his leadership which had simmered inside the Labor Party erupted publicly. At that point, he also decided he'd had enough. Suddenly, it wasn't the troops who were out, but Latham himself. It wasn't quite by Christmas but it wasn't long after.

11

THE CALL

TWO DAYS AFTER AUSTRALIA Day, in the late summer of 2005, Labor elected its third leader in two years. Kim Beazley was back in the job.

Beazley was opposed to what the government had done in Iraq and, like Kevin Rudd, believed it should be doing more in Afghanistan. Before he returned to the front bench, back before the election, Beazley had given his own speech to the Australian Institute of International Affairs about the US alliance.

'The Howard government may be the ally the United States currently wants, but it is not the ally the United States currently needs,' he said. He accused Howard of failing to fully assert an independently Australian view and stand up to Uncle Sam. It was a tough speech. Beazley argued that the war in Iraq had created 'a new field of jihad' for Islamic fundamentalists opposed to the US and its way of life. It had split the western alliance, he said, enraged the Muslim world and made some populations turn on their own moderate leaders, damaged the reputation of western intelligence, over-stretched the US military, boosted Iran's cockiness and 'put Afghanistan on the backburner'.

'Whatever the argument about Iraq, Afghanistan needed to be effectively finished,' Beazley said. 'Special Forces were withdrawn from Afghanistan for participation in Iraq.' That message had been building from within the centre-left of politics for some time. Both the US Democrats and the Australian Labor Party were beginning to portray Afghanistan as a good war to contrast it with a bad one: Iraq.

Howard government ministers thought that sort of sentiment from Beazley was hypocritical. They did not recall hearing either him or Rudd demanding that the troops stay on when they were withdrawn in 2002.

Former foreign minister Alexander Downer had no time for the argument that the US and its allies ‘took their eye off the ball’. ‘Believe me, John Howard and I will never think it was wrong to get rid of Saddam Hussein and I don’t think any of our strategies in any other part of the world were remotely compromised,’ Downer said.

But few could deny that while public attention had been on the deteriorating situation in Iraq, security in Afghanistan had nosedived. The US began to see signs that Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) was easing back on its efforts to curb insurgent activity on its side of the border. They feared that the Taliban fighters who had buried their weapons were digging them up.

‘We needed some help again,’ former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage said in 2011. ‘Particularly as Iraq wasn’t going as per somebody’s plans—you know, the cakewalk, and … throwing flowers at us.’ The facetious dig was aimed at those in the US Defense Department who had predicted publicly that victory in Iraq would be a ‘cakewalk’. It had hardly turned out to be a bed of roses and, by 2005, neither was Afghanistan. Things were turning bad.

Australia began to come under increasing pressure from the United States to go back in. It was not something the government had contemplated when it pulled troops out on military advice three years earlier. Now, having successfully scaled Operation Slipper back to a single desk officer in Kabul, it was rapidly looking like something it could not avoid.

Several approaches had been made through officials, just gentle soundings-out to start with, about what Australia’s attitude might be should a request be forthcoming. Unless the Americans knew they would get a positive response, they would not formalise the message: the wink-and-a-nod system of diplomacy. From the Australian side, it was a version of that old corner-store check-out warning: ‘Please don’t ask for credit as refusal often offends’. A gentle hint not to bother taking it further.

Thus far, the Australian response had not been positive. But there are ways and ways to get a message through. Armitage had officially left office

in February of that year. But whenever Downer was in Washington to see his counterpart, the Secretary of State, who was by then Condoleezza Rice, Armitage would swing by his hotel for a chat. The former deputy secretary confirmed that on at least one visit, the subject came up: ‘I did have a conversation with him. To call it an intervention—because I had no official imprimatur—would be incorrect.’

Nonetheless, Armitage was not without connections. Or influence.

*

In 2005, Andrew Shearer headed the political branch at the Australian Embassy in Washington, having previously worked for Defence Minister Robert Hill. Shearer recalls a gradual realisation that Australia needed to resurrect its Afghan operation. ‘It was becoming clear that the Americans were looking at gearing up their effort there again and that, in alliance terms, we were starting to look a little bit underdone.’

The then High Commissioner to London, Michael L’Estrange, concurred. ‘Word came through pretty strongly that the Americans were very, very hopeful that we would re-engage in some form. And I think this became not just a concern in Australia about the situation on the ground in the middle of 2005 but also this was a matter, now, of alliance politics. Basically, saying “No” was going to be extremely difficult.’

On the military side, the message became louder. Returning from military-to-military talks in Washington at the end of the Australian autumn, defence officials reported that their US counterparts wanted them to go back in, this time with a provincial reconstruction task force.

Provincial reconstruction was what the NATO-dominated International Security Assistance Force, ISAF, was doing, although restrictions on its reach—and the absence of the Americans—meant its early work had not gone far beyond Kabul. In Canberra, the relevant departments were not keen. Reconstruction was not clean or surgical or quick and the risk of

casualties was high. There was little enthusiasm within Defence, Foreign Affairs and Trade or Prime Minister and Cabinet for the American request.

But Robert Hill took a different view. Having been involved in the original military action, Hill believed Australia had an obligation to help rebuild. ‘We went in to do a specific job that was achievable,’ Hill said of the 2001 deployment. ‘But what we didn’t understand—maybe we did and we didn’t want to face up to it, similarly in Iraq—is once you really get in there, you can’t just walk away.’

In June, Hill took a submission to Cabinet’s National Security Committee advocating that Australia return forces to Afghanistan, in the form of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). He had eventually persuaded the key departments to, reluctantly, back the plan. Defence prepared the submission, which proposed a drawdown of forces in Iraq and a redeployment to Afghanistan. The Special Forces Command was not consulted in the drafting and discovered after the submission had gone forward that a Special Forces contingent was not being recommended. The submission argued that sending Special Forces was high risk and the soldiers needed a break following their work in Iraq. The Iraq deployment had changed, with the formation of the Al Muthanna Task Group—an Australian battle group deployed to provide security for Japanese military engineers.

The Defence Minister outlined his Afghanistan proposal to his colleagues. But the discussion took a turn which Hill had not anticipated. Instead of focussing solely on reconstruction, which would involve Australian engineers, Howard and Downer wanted to talk about security. It was another example of their style of government—a two-man decision team which had sometimes settled on a preferred outcome before a meeting had begun. If the country was as unstable as it appeared, they argued, then Australia should be sending soldiers to help fix that before building roads and bridges.

By the time the meeting was over, Hill’s proposal had been substantially redesigned. When he went in, he was talking about reconstruction. When he

came out, he had only secured an in-principle agreement to pursue it. But in the immediate future, he was being asked for a new submission to send 150 SAS troops back to Afghanistan instead. ‘I thought the appropriate operation for us was a military operation at that time,’ Howard said in 2011. ‘But I didn’t sort of close my mind to the idea of having PRTs later on.’

The Chief of the Defence Force, General Peter Cosgrove, was about to retire. Now, he was faced with preparing the ADF for re-deployment. ‘I think Australia went back when the serious problems in Afghanistan were evident and the need was unmistakable,’ Cosgrove said in 2011. At the time, though, he let it be known within Defence that he was not keen on redeploying to Afghanistan. The Defence Force assured government that this would be no simple in-and-out exercise.

There were cost implications for starters. In the year following September 11, fiscal year 2001–02, the federal government had allocated $1.1 billion to Australia’s Afghanistan deployment under Operation Slipper. For the two years after that, after the effective withdrawal, it was down to $2 million, and then in 2004–05, to $1 million. Some navy personnel based in the Middle East were officially dually assigned to the Iraqi Operation Catalyst and the Afghan Operation Slipper but were funded under Operation Catalyst. The in-country contribution in Afghanistan was down to one and then two men.

Eventually, when the decision was made in 2005 to send forces back, the price tag would rise exponentially In 2005–06, the budget allocated to Operation Slipper was $550 million. As of 2010–11, the annual allocation was $1.6 billion. But in deciding to go back, money wasn’t the main issue. It was what kind of contribution Australia could usefully make and how big a risk was attached to it.

Some within the Special Forces community thought Cosgrove’s reluctance stemmed from the age-old dynamic which tended to pit the elite side of the Army against the regular side, from which Cosgrove had come. But he told others his fear was that if Australia got back into the Afghan

conflict, it would never get out and its commitment would be forced to grow and grow.

The submission was sent back to Defence, pronto, with a notation from Hill saying he wanted Special Forces. Special Operations Command said they could do it. They argued that the physical risk to any Australian contingent—the major consideration—could be mitigated if Special Forces were involved. They also argued that such a contribution would be less expensive than a conventional task force and the United States was likely to value it highly.

Before his retirement, which came in the first week of July, Cosgrove oversaw preparation of a plan which involved a Special Forces task force. But it was small—about 45 people, who would be assigned to special tasks. This was in line with his view that too much more would put Australia on the slippery slope of open-ended deployment.

The government had not signed off on the final commitment when Cosgrove retired on 3 July 2005, so the rest of the planning was then handed on to former Chief of Air Force, the then Air Marshal Angus Houston, who was promoted to Air Chief Marshal and became CDF.

Houston had a different view of the proposal. Without critical mass, he argued, the job could not be done properly. He upped the numbers to 170. By the time the Special Forces were deployed in August, there were 190.

*

Before the deployment was finalised, there was another decision to be made. Where within Afghanistan would Australia’s forces be based?

As ever, the threshold issue was risk. Ministers and defence planners were weighing up the value of the work against the potential for casualties. The then secretary of the Defence Department, Ric Smith, suggested they consider Bamiyan province in central Afghanistan. The Kiwis were working there, and Australia and New Zealand could form an ANZAC-style PRT operation together. The Bamiyan Valley had been the site of two

massive sixth-century stone Buddha statues carved into the cliff face until March 2001, when the Taliban used explosives to destroy them.

There was not as much insurgent activity in Bamiyan as in some of the southern provinces, and that made it a safer option. While the idea had some support within the defence establishment, the government rejected it. They wanted to find a location where a solid contribution could be made.

The then Deputy Special Operations Commander, Brigadier Tim McOwan, and the then Special Air Service Commander, Lieutenant Colonel James McMahon, were dispatched to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to meet with the head of US Joint Special Operations Command, General Stanley McChrystal, to discuss where the Australians might work. The officers told McChrystal that Australia wanted to work alongside US Special Forces and asked what role they might play. The US was short of helicopters and McChrystal wanted to know what Australia might bring to the operation. They were offering intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance with all the associated logistics and medical support, as they had in 2001. Australian Special Forces had distinguished themselves in Afghanistan then and the US knew what they could do. Within the world's elite-soldier community, they were still considered to be tier one.

But the task force operating under McChrystal's command was doing particularly shadowy work. The US Joint Special Operations Command ran what was known as Joint Task Force 714, sometimes described as 'a secretive detachment', which ranged across Afghanistan doing the most 'special' of the special operations. Four years later, Wikileaks would publish a US cable confirming the task force had planned and engaged in covert operations in Pakistan. In the cable, dated 9 October 2009, and made public in November 2010, the US ambassador to Pakistan, Anne Patterson, detailed how US Special Forces had been seeking Pakistani approval to operate across the border, secretly embedded with Pakistani forces, and had finally received it. It described the issue as 'highly politically sensitive' because of public concerns in Pakistan about sovereignty.

If such activity was on the horizon then, it might have made Australian involvement complicated. The Joint Special Operations Command forces were focussed on al Qaeda and the Haqqani network, another insurgent group which operated in Afghanistan but was based in North Waziristan, Pakistan. The Cabinet submission for an Australian Special Forces deployment, which Australia's National Security Committee had endorsed, specified its target as 'the Taliban'. That meant that working with the American Special Forces task force was not feasible.

The then Chief of Army, Peter Leahy, described the dilemma:

> The Americans were trying to sit on the border because this was Tora Bora and they reckoned that's where Osama bin Laden had nipped over, and they were getting ready to go and jump on him. And we said, 'No, we don't want to be anywhere near that.' Because that problem of working across the border and coordinating with the Pakistanis, that was just going to be too hard.

On 13 July 2005, when Howard eventually announced Australia's redeployment to Afghanistan, he faced questions about Pakistan. Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf had just visited Australia. 'Did you discuss any specific roles … for the SAS with President Musharraf when he was here and would you expect them to operate into Pakistan?' a journalist asked him. Howard's response was brief. 'The answer is no.'

*

John Howard had developed a good relationship with Musharraf, despite his having risen to power in a military coup. Pakistan had been suspended from the Commonwealth's democracy club since 1999 and Howard was a democracy advocate. But the more he got to know Musharraf, the more he liked him. 'He wasn't running a perfect democracy by any means,' Howard

said in 2011. ‘But it seemed with all the challenges he had brought a measure of stability to the place and he was on our side in relation to Afghanistan.’

With relations between the US and Pakistan less than relaxed, that had its benefits. ‘I think it would be overstating it to say I was consciously a go-between,’ Howard said. ‘But I think I did provide a sort of alternative to the Americans’ point of reference in the West which he felt comfortable with.’ Compared to some fundamentalist ideas emerging in Pakistan, Musharraf’s approach was moderate and Howard found him an easy person with whom to exchange views. ‘I had quite a respect for him.’

Exactly a month before announcing the redeployment of Special Forces to Afghanistan on 13 July 2005, Howard welcomed President Musharraf to Australia. It was the first time a Pakistani president had visited Australia since the country was born in 1947. During the three-day visit, Howard hosted a state luncheon in his guest’s honour and signed a swag of agreements, including one on counter-terrorism. The two men also held a joint news conference. With Musharraf beside him in the prime ministerial courtyard, Howard said:

> I told the President how much I personally and the Australian government admires his courageous participation and that of his country in the fight against terrorism. He himself has survived two assassination attempts. It’s a measure of the danger that he’s exposed himself to in participating in that fight and it ought to be a mark of the regard we have for him and the courage that he’s displayed.

Musharraf thanked Howard for his hospitality and returned the favour: ‘I have invited the Prime Minister to Pakistan. It would be our honour if Mr Prime Minister, with his wife, came to Pakistan and gave us an opportunity to reciprocate the hospitality that has been shown to us here in Australia.’

Four months later a devastating earthquake struck Pakistan, killing more than 80,000 people. Australia sent a defence medical team to assist and, in late November, Howard took up the invitation to visit, stopping off in Pakistan between attending the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation group leaders' meeting in South Korea and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta.

The visit confirmed Howard's view of Musharraf. The two couples had breakfast together and Janette Howard and the President's wife, Begum Sehba Musharraf, talked about the role of women. The Howards found the Musharrafs to be reasoned and thoughtful.

They then flew by helicopter into the Neelam Valley where the quake had struck, to see some of the damage and visit the Australian medical team. The base had been named Camp Bradman, not by the Australians but by the cricket-mad Pakistani military team with whom they were working. As is the case across the entire sub-continent, it was impossible to escape cricket, even there.

I'd discovered that myself in India some nine years earlier on a study tour researching child labour. When I sat down underneath a bridge which was home to a mob of street kids in Mumbai, all they wanted to discuss was whether I knew a bloke called 'Al-*lan* Bor-*der.*' They were quite disappointed that I didn't.

In the mountains of Pakistan, John Howard didn't cover himself in cricketing glory, either. The local lads were having a game and he took a turn as bowler. The Prime Minister doggedly tossed down wild wides and dead balls in three wince-inducing attempts to get near the stumps, before someone took pity and handed him the bat instead. He redeemed himself with a couple of walloping drives, but not enough to spare some embarrassment on the evening news. The pictures are still on *YouTube*.

Despite sharing a love of cricket, Howard's personal relationship with Musharraf would fade two years later when the former military leader crossed a constitutional bridge too far. 'They seemed to me to have a handle on the need for Pakistan to be more progressive and more tolerant,' Howard

said. ‘But he sacked his chief justice, and it was hard for a believer in constitutional processes like me to agree with that.’

In November 2007, just before he lost office and his own seat, Howard phoned Musharraf to try to convey the uncomfortable position in which he found himself in the wake of the Pakistani judge’s sacking. After the two men had chatted for ten minutes about cricket, Howard gingerly raised the subject: ‘Well, it’s all pretty difficult, isn’t it?’

Musharraf explained why he had done what he’d done and Howard listened. But the explanation was not going to affect the outcome. ‘What I was trying to convey to him was that he was making it very hard to be friends.’

*

With the option of working alongside the Americans in Afghanistan off the table, the Australian two-man Special Forces delegation had to look elsewhere for something useful to do. Having travelled from the US to Afghanistan, they approached the Coalition Joint Special Operations Task Force which oversaw the Special Forces in Afghanistan, beyond the Americans’ secret activities. They were told about areas in central and southern Afghanistan where insurgents were active, including Uruzgan province where there was a need for help.

The men were flown south to Kandahar Air Field, told to put on their body armour and then flown up to what was then known as Forward Operating Base Davis, later named Kamp Holland. They flew out over the high hills above Kandahar and the Blackhawks fired their mini guns. ‘I remember thinking, “we must be going into Indian country”,’ the now Major-General Tim McOwan said.

The helicopters made a low loop over the town of Tarin Kowt and below them was a dusty sea of black turbans; a man’s body was strung up from a lamp post on the town’s central roundabout. Just beyond the town, Forward Operating Base Davis was an almost-tumbleweed scene, with broken down

security walls and little protection. It was settled then. This was where the Australians would work.

*

Before the government finalised the structure of its new deployment to Afghanistan, there would be yet another reminder that terrorists could strike anywhere. On 7 July, a series of blasts on London's metropolitan transport system—one on a double-decker bus and three on the underground—killed 56 people and injured 700. For Howard, the most chilling dimension to the horrific attack was that the suicide bombers were 'home-grown'. They had not come into Britain from elsewhere. They were born there.

Exactly two weeks after the bombings, on 21 July, Howard and those of us in his usual entourage would be in London when a second round of bombs on buses and trains failed to detonate. As the news came through on the radio that afternoon of more suspected bombs, Howard was lunching with the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, at Downing Street and we in the travelling media were sitting on a coach in city traffic, on our way there. The same momentary fear I'd felt on the street in Washington leapt up again as I looked out the window at the red double-decker bus beside us. We made bleak jokes and I tried not to think about it.

Once safely there, we were ushered through the famous front door of Number 10 and upstairs for a news conference with Howard and Blair. Blair began:

> I think all I would like to say is this: that we know why these things are done, they are done to scare people and to frighten them, to make them anxious and worried. Fortunately in this instance there appear to have been no casualties. The police have done their very best, and the security services too, in the situation, and I think we have just to react calmly and continue with our business as much as possible, as normal.

Howard offered his condolences to the British people over the bombings of two weeks earlier:

> Australia sympathises with, supports and will remain steadfast with Britain in pursuit of the common values and common causes that we have. Terrorism is the enemy of all free people. Terrorism is not just about individual circumstances and individual events. Terrorism is about the perverted use of an ideology for evil intent and for evil objectives. And those who think that terrorism is incident-specific misunderstand … the workings of the minds of terrorists.

Howard had no doubt he had done the right thing in agreeing to send forces back to Afghanistan. He was convinced his decision was right on Iraq, too. At Downing Street, he linked it all together: ‘Afghanistan is an important battle ground against terrorism, so is Iraq, and nobody should imagine that the terrorists would be other than absolutely delighted if there were a faltering of will.’

The London incidents and a second fatal bombing in Bali in October 2005 reinforced Howard’s concern that the tentacles of terrorism were reaching not only widely, but deeply, into the West.

*

A few days before he left for London, via Washington, Howard had announced his government’s decision to redeploy the SAS to Afghanistan. At the time, he said it had been in response to requests from the Americans, the Afghan government and ‘others’—a reference to the British. He also flagged the future dispatch of a Provincial Reconstruction Team at a news conference in Canberra, with Robert Hill beside him:

> This Provincial Reconstruction Team could involve up to 200 personnel and if a final decision is taken to send it, then it would go in probably about April, May or June of next year. We intend to discuss aspects of this with our allies and with the government of Afghanistan.

This was 180 degrees from where the government had been until now. It was committing to an open-ended, potentially messy nation-building exercise—the very thing Howard was adamant back in 2001 that Australia should not be involved with. In Afghanistan in 2001–02 and again in Iraq, Howard had insisted on finite, sharp deployments.

This one carried a much greater risk of casualties. Australia had suffered only one combat death in Afghanistan to date, and none in Iraq. (Private Jacob Kovco was killed in Iraq a year later in an incident in his barracks involving his own gun.) As prime ministers do when deploying soldiers to war, Howard warned Australians there was a risk that some would not come home.

Looking back from the vantage point of having left politics, Alexander Downer described this as the beginning of what he called ‘mission creep’. He acknowledged that in the case of both Afghanistan and Iraq, the joint military objective of the US and its allies was to get rid of the respective regimes (despite a reluctance to admit so in relation to Iraq at the time) but that it changed. Downer described how the government approached things with the Americans:

> We will help you go in there and get rid of the regime—regime change. And if that requires a lot of war fighting we’ll do it. We’ll do it at the pointy end. But what we don’t want to do is get bogged down in long-term peacekeeping in Iraq or Afghanistan. Now what has happened in the case of Afghanistan is we have got really bogged down there—we collectively, not just Australia —we have gotten really bogged down there.

Richard Armitage was clear on why he thought the decision was made: ‘The reason I said initially Australia went in was much more in Australia’s interests. I think the second time, it was much more in order to support the US–Australia relationship.’

Howard put it differently: ‘If I’d decided it was right for us to go in in 2001 and if the objective we thought we had achieved by 2002 had begun to unravel, then the same imperative in 2001 should exist in 2005.’

To the government, supporting Australia’s interests and the US alliance were one and the same thing.

12

GOING DUTCH

THE REDEPLOYMENT TO AFGHANISTAN carried conditions. Australia was prepared to share security and reconstruction responsibility in what would become one of the more dangerous provinces in Afghanistan, but it wouldn't take the lead role. And it reserved the right to reject inappropriate partners. Some early suggestions—including Serbia—were dismissed as incompatible.

Compatibility is a complicated issue. It relates to training standards, operating procedure, rules of engagement and basic things like communication. Not long after Australia decided to go back to Afghanistan, a potential partner emerged. The Dutch Defence Force had been working in the northern Afghan province of Baghlan as part of the International Security Assistance Force, running a pilot of a Provincial Reconstruction Team in an area considered relatively safe. In mid-2005, the Dutch were contemplating moving their PRT pilot further south and operating in more dangerous territory where the country was much less stable. But they needed someone to work with.

On 24 June 2005, Australia's ambassador to the Netherlands, Stephen Brady, was invited to a VIP lunch aboard a Dutch warship, HNLMS *Evertsen*. 'It seemed just an innocuous invitation to a nice afternoon on a Dutch frigate,' Brady said in 2011. It turned out to be an invitation to slightly more than that. On board ship, Brady was approached by the Netherlands' Director of Military Operations, General Pieter Cobelens, who had heard a rumour that Australia was considering returning to Afghanistan. He wanted to know if it was true and if it would consider a partnership.

Ideally, Australia would always seek to partner with the US or Britain first. But the Netherlands had a serious defence force, compatible with

Australia's standards. And on top of that, its soldiers spoke English. 'In the Netherlands [there] was great enthusiasm to work with the Australians because we have a lot in common … a long-lasting friendship—400 years plus—and thousands [of] former and present backpackers!' Cobelens said.

Brady said he would check with Canberra. Two days later he contacted Cobelens, confirming Australia was, indeed, going back and indicating the Defence Force was interested in the Netherlands' invitation. 'From that moment on, we started to plan on working together,' Cobelens said. 'We were happy with the initially small contribution but thought that this would grow over the coming years.'

Reconstruction was part of the 'hearts and minds' phase of the war, in which the allies needed to build stronger community ties and prove they could keep their promises of support. Afghans had heard such promises too many times before.

The Taliban and other insurgent forces were able to stand over the local people, arguing that while the invaders would eventually leave, they would be there forever. There was a favourite Taliban saying: Americans might have watches, but *they* had the time.

The PRTs were the collective forerunner to what would eventually become a full-blown counter-insurgency strategy, based on the principle: clear, hold, build. Under counter-insurgency, the idea is to clear the enemy, hold the land and build the community. John Howard believed the principle itself was reason enough to send Special Forces back, first. 'Clear, hold, build,' Howard said in 2011. 'Reconstruction is building but that comes after the military part doesn't it? I rest my case.'

The eventual Dutch PRT in Uruzgan was ahead of its time. It earned the Netherlands much praise for creativity and for the strength of its provincial relationships, although sometimes accompanied by the suggestion that it was at the expense of actual fighting.

The Dutch called it the 'oil spot strategy'—developing a footprint over three cities, the outer perimeter defended by Dutch and Australian troops while in the centre, work was done on building the local economy, boosting

governance and training security authorities. NATO later used the strategy as the model for its own version, known as the ‘three Ds’: defence, development and diplomacy.

In 2005, the plan was for Britain, Canada and the Netherlands to share the leadership of what would be known as Regional Command South, covering the troublesome provinces of Helmand, Kandahar, Nimruz, Zabol, Daykundi and Uruzgan. The centre and south are the heartland of the Taliban, which emerged out of Kandahar around 1994. The British called the line-up the ‘three musketeers’. Australia would be a fourth.

There was historical significance to the potential partnership, as Dutch Prime Minister Dr Jan Pieter Balkenende noted when he visited Australia in 2006. ‘You were in [the] Second World War,’ Balkenende said at a joint news conference with John Howard. ‘We were working together, were standing together in the fight against the Japanese and Australian troops helped to liberate The Netherlands. So we shared the responsibilities in those days and we will never forget it.’

But in 2005, before the Dutch government could formalise a partnership, it needed the backing of Parliament. It was a minority government in a diverse coalition. Any deployment had to be approved by a super-majority including the Opposition. The finely balanced Dutch parliamentary system and degree of political micro-management of the military would prove extremely challenging for the Australians. It was a different military-civilian relationship than they were used to and difficult to navigate. To them, it seemed the Dutch military could barely move without the explicit agreement of their elected representatives.

In Australia, the government makes the decision to go to war and the Defence Force advises on capability and executes the operation. The politicians are ultimately in charge, but the military has considerable autonomy.

In 2005, the Dutch Defence Force was enthusiastic to participate and pressing its government for approval. Some hoped it might restore honour to a force severely damaged in a previous operation. Dutch soldiers had

faced international condemnation following their role in Bosnia a decade earlier, where 400 Dutch peacekeepers had presided over the fall of Srebrenica to the Serbian Army under Commander Ratko Mladic. Mladic became a fugitive after the International Criminal Tribunal of Yugoslavia issued a warrant for his arrest for crimes against humanity and genocide. He was captured and put on trial in 2011.

Because of restrictive rules of engagement and a lack of UN support, the Dutch had failed to prevent the murder of some 8000 Bosnian men and boys in what became the worst massacre in Europe since World War II. The incident brought great shame on the Netherlands' military. In the years after they returned home, senior Dutch officers would, privately, tell of being spat on if they wore their uniforms in the street.

The United Nations marked the tenth anniversary of the massacre with a special ceremony on 11 July 2005. Secretary General Kofi Annan offered a reminder of the series of failures in Srebrenica:

> We can say—and it is true—that great nations failed to respond adequately. We can say—and it is also true—that there should have been stronger military forces in place, and a stronger will to use them. We can say—and it is undeniable—that blame lies, first and foremost, with those who planned and carried out the massacre, or who assisted them, or who harboured and are harbouring them still. But we cannot evade our own share of responsibility.

In December 2006, a US embassy cable would describe America's view:

> Srebrenica dramatically influenced Dutch military deployments overseas, including especially requirements to team with other countries and maintain clear rules of engagement. These factors were considered heavily in the Netherlands' decision to deploy to Afghanistan. Srebrenica also contributed to an inferiority

> complex that Dutch military leadership has long sought to overcome.

Since Srebrenica, the Netherlands Defence Force had undertaken several missions in Ethiopia, Kosovo and in Iraq, where they had handed stewardship of al Muthanna province to the forces from Australia. Some senior Australian defence officials noted years later that the Iraq experience should have served as a warning. The Dutch would end up doing in Afghanistan what they did in Iraq—withdraw.

But although there were many critics, Australia didn't quite put its money where its mouth was. After the Dutch withdrawal in 2010, Australia would decline to step up and take the lead.

*

Initially, Dutch defence planners proposed a PRT of 1800 people, but the Labor Opposition in the Hague forced a compromise, scaling it back to 1000–1200 to allow deployment to the operation in Africa. In order to try to persuade the Parliament, Dutch Chief of Defence Staff General Dick Berlijn had been talking to the Americans about securing US support. He had also been talking to the Australians.

A cable to the US State Department from its embassy in The Hague praised the Dutch for their role in rallying support for a PRT, including among the Australians.

> The Dutch deployment of Special Forces in a combat role represents a major shift in Dutch priorities away from peacekeeping to combat missions for the first time since the 1960s. The Dutch remain a strong supporter in the war on terrorism in Afghanistan. We should encourage them both to continue to make significant contributions, and to push others to do more.

But by September, the arrangement was still not sealed. Another cable, this time from the US Embassy to the Pentagon, indicated it was the Australians who hadn't made up their minds. But the Dutch government had placed their own conditions on any agreement to deploy forces, in order to help win over Parliament. The cable, dated 22 September 2005, said:

> Such preconditions include securing US intelligence and logistics support, establishing a PRT partnership with Australia and cost-sharing to renovate Kandahar Airport. The Dutch have suggested that a pitch by the USG [US Government] might help convince Australia to team with the Netherlands in Uruzgan and may raise this and possible US intelligence and logistics support to the Dutch PRT.

The US stepped up its encouragement. The arrangement would serve a dual purpose. The US wanted the Dutch to move south, but they wouldn't go without a solid partner. It also wanted the Australians. They could help make up the shortfall in optimum numbers forced by the Dutch parliamentary compromise. Here was the perfect solution.

Former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, who had left office prior to arrangements being finalised, said Australia fitted the bill of stable partner:

> Australians are seen as generally pretty independent minded. They make their own decisions. They don't engage in idle worship of heroes in their own society. These are pretty salt of the earth folks. And I mean that in a positive way. And when Australia aligns themselves with an endeavour or another it's generally a worthy endeavour.

As the planning continued, the ADF sent a young Dutch-speaking officer—Major Scott Winter—to The Hague to work within the Dutch

Defence Department. Winter was able to keep abreast of the twists and turns as the PRT proposal wound its way through the Dutch political system and keep the Australian Government informed. As a Dutch speaker, he was warmly welcomed and widely trusted within the defence establishment and was soon learning a great deal about what was going on.

Unlike in Australia, the Dutch were accustomed to accommodating a range of views within the government, and sometimes between the government and its own defence force and bureaucracy. From the Australian end, everything had to be checked and cross-checked from minister to minister—each coming from a different party—and between the ministries and the defence force, where contrary views were common. It was Ambassador Stephen Brady's job to work out who thought what, anticipate where the complex debate was headed, and report it all back to Canberra. He had to go back and forth between ministers and military officers—all expressing different views—to disentangle the web of information and turn it into sense.

Month after month, the issue dragged on in The Hague. Brady recalled the long wait: 'I think it would be fair to say Canberra was agog with this endless stream of cables coming from the embassy, from me. Whatever "decision" was being taken by the Dutch seemed to have qualification upon qualification attached to it. It really was a non-stop dance of the seven veils.'

Persistent delays at the Dutch end would come to mark the military relationship and become a source of immense frustration for Australia.

*

As the PRT planning plodded on, Special Forces headed back to Afghanistan. They deployed on 24 August 2005 and a month later, were involved in a massive firefight. Defence Minister Robert Hill, who was in Afghanistan at the time, reported that ten insurgents had been killed but that the Australians had escaped injury.

When Defence Force chief Angus Houston, who was travelling with Hill, told the minister about the aggressive encounter, he was shocked at the ferocity of the firefight, in which all of the Special Forces vehicles were badly shot up.

Just over a week later, Houston would conduct a briefing for Cabinet's National Security Committee, complete with map and pointer, to explain exactly where the soldiers were and what the soldiers were doing. It was, he reminded them a dangerous place.

Houston was asked what sort of protective equipment the soldiers had and he explained that they had Bushmaster vehicles. The Bushmasters were an Australian prototype light armoured vehicle with a V-shaped hull. Higher off the ground than regular patrol vehicles, they were proving better equipped to protect soldiers from land mines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). They had been built in Bendigo and, unusually, tested on operations, during the Australian deployment in Iraq.

'What's a Bushmaster?' Houston was asked. The patient CDF began again, from the beginning.

*

In November 2005, Prime Minister John Howard made his first visit to Afghanistan. He had not visited the troops during their one-year deployment three years earlier. This redeployment was also set down for just a year. But he felt it was important to go.

Having decided to wedge a visit to Pakistan in between his consecutive conference visits to South Korea and Malta, he took a further detour. Heads of government are never very keen to foreshadow visits to war zones and there is often a touch of obfuscation, even trickery, involved in getting in and preferably out again without tipping off anyone but those who absolutely need to know.

During his Pakistan trip, Howard made a lightning-fast dash across the border by air, swinging through the Australian base at Tarin Kowt to see the

Special Forces Task Group, and then up to Kabul for talks with President Hamid Karzai.

At a joint news conference, Karzai opened with a dig about the speed of the visit. ‘We would have very much liked to host His Excellency for a longer time, but since His Excellency is travelling to other countries he will not be able to spend much more time in Kabul,’ he said.

Howard thanked Karzai and said he respected his courage:

> I do want to congratulate you for the leadership that you have shown in bringing about openness and democracy to this country. It is a long struggle and it’s a difficult struggle. But it’s a struggle that involves many friends from around the world, and we have a common interest in fighting terrorism and we have a common interest in winning, because if the fanatical dictates of terrorism succeed the kind of world that we have enjoyed in Australia and the kind of world that I know you want to enjoy here in Afghanistan will not be realised.

Howard spoke about the work the Australians were doing. ‘They are not just there on a military mission, they are also there on a friendship mission,’ he said, describing the need to build community relationships. That was seen as a forerunner to provincial reconstruction and Karzai was asked what contribution Australia might usefully make.

He responded by way of a nudge. ‘Well if Australia decides to send us a Provincial Reconstructive Team, we in Afghanistan will be very happy and we will welcome them to participate in the reconstruction of Afghanistan.’ Karzai explained that PRTs were an assurance to local people that they were secure and helped greatly in rebuilding local communities. ‘So for both purposes, the PRTs are in the interests of Afghanistan and in the interests of the fight against terrorism. So at any time if Australia decides to send a PRT we will welcome it.’

Howard was still unable to confirm any arrangements: ‘Well, for Australia’s part, that issue is still under consideration.’

*

The new year brought change. Defence Minister Robert Hill announced, unexpectedly, that he was stepping down and would soon retire from politics altogether. There were rumours that he would become the new Australian ambassador to the UN, in New York.

At his 20 January news conference, he received a direct question: ‘Have you been offered the job as Australia’s ambassador to the United Nations?’ He gave a direct answer: ‘No.’ At the time, he was telling the truth. His appointment as UN ambassador was announced on 17 March, two days after he left Parliament. Hill’s departure from the ministry also afforded John Howard the opportunity for a reshuffle. He appointed Brendan Nelson Minister for Defence.

But one issue not resolved over Christmas was the Dutch impasse. The delays were becoming ridiculous and the Australians decided they needed to do something to move things along.

Australia had already increased its renewed deployment to Afghanistan, planning to send two Chinook helicopters and 110 extra personnel to be based at Kandahar Air Field. They would eventually deploy in March. But it was the reconstruction element which remained bogged in Dutch politics.

Australia’s ambassador to The Hague, Stephen Brady, was arranging a spectacular gala dinner to mark the 400th anniversary of Dutch contact with Australia through the arrival of its ship, the *Duyfken*. The event, which coincided with the Dutch Parliament’s debate on Afghanistan, was a good opportunity for some more direct diplomacy.

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer flew to the Netherlands to attend the big bash. Brady’s diplomatic skills and remarkably extensive network of connections had secured an extraordinary range of high-profile people

including Dutch and Australian swimming stars and celebrities. The Crown Prince and Princess attended, along with Dutch Prime Minister Jan Balkenende. Downer liked Balkenende. When the Dutch Prime Minister visited Australia two months later, Downer took him to the Grand Prix. ‘He’s also—like me—a petrol head,’ Downer said. ‘He likes racing cars.’ Also at the huge dinner was Dutch Foreign Minister, Ben Bot, and the NATO Secretary-General, Dutchman Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. It was a chance for an informal chat.

Later, Downer had official talks with Balkenende, Defence Minister Henk Kamp and General Dick Berlijn. But it was still Parliament and the multi-party coalition arrangement which was the problem.

On 3 February, after six months of wrangling and a final late-night debate, Balkenende got his way. The Dutch Parliament approved the deployment of 1400 troops to Uruzgan to join the 600 already stationed in Kabul. In Australia, on 21 February, Howard announced that a 200-strong Australian Reconstruction Task Force would be sent to Afghanistan as part of a Netherlands-led PRT.

Four days later, at Perth’s Campbell Barracks, he welcomed home the first elements of the Special Forces Task Group which had been serving in Afghanistan for five months and had arrived back in Australia in January. The second contingent would return in March.

Howard told the Australians they were the best in the world:

> Your reputation, your ability, your courage, your skill has the admiration of all of the Australian people. The struggle against terrorism in which this country is engaged is not going to end soon. It will go on for some time. It will require a great deal of persistence. There will be times when people will wonder whether it is worth the effort. But let me say to you that it is worth the effort because the sort of way of life that we are opposing is a way of life that would never win any acceptance in our country, it’s a way of life which is completely anathema to

> everything that this country stands for … From the bottom of my heart, thank you for what you have done for Australia. We are immensely proud of all of you. You are a wonderful demonstration of the Australian spirit.

*

When Jan Balkenende visited Australia in April 2006 it was a stark contrast to what he'd left behind. Here, there was no controversy about the two countries' impending joint operation and, in fact, little public interest. 'You have a very well-skilled army and we are looking forward to work together,' the Dutch Prime Minister said at a joint news conference.

We from the media didn't ask either leader about the pending deployment at all. The questions were all about immigration, Indonesian relations, climate change and Australian health policy. Howard announced that Australia would establish a proper embassy in Kabul and move its diplomats from the Serena Hotel, where they had been based, into the Dutch embassy compound. It was a generous offer from the Dutch, designed originally to house just two or three Australians. But the Australian government boosted the numbers, which was not part of the deal. There were also differences of view on appropriate levels of security. The arrangement eventually collapsed.

At time of writing, the Australian embassy operated from a number of locations which were not publicly disclosed.

In May 2006, Howard and Defence Minister Brendan Nelson re-announced the reconstruction deployment, revealing that there would now be 240 personnel leaving Australia in July to join the Dutch operation. Howard preempted any criticism of the partner's reputation. 'I should say to Australians that we are very impressed with the military capability of the Dutch forces that are being deployed to Afghanistan,' Howard said. 'We're very confident that we'll be able to work with them very closely, and we're very confident in their abilities.'

In fact, Australian political and military leaders had been deeply concerned about the Dutch abilities, the political difficulties in reaching decisions, and the possibility that restrictive Dutch rules of engagement could put Australians at risk. They had overcome the worst of their concerns and were satisfied enough to proceed.

But July came and went and still the newly named RTF-1 did not deploy.

*

The Defence Force chiefs wanted to bring the Special Forces home and leave them there. But Brendan Nelson was worried about security and argued a Special Forces element had to remain.

On 9 August, the government added another 150 soldiers as a protection force and again boosted the size of the RTF, this time to 270. Howard announced the decision in a ministerial statement to Parliament. He told the House:

> Afghanistan's social indicators remain sobering. At forty-six years, Afghan life expectancy is one of the world's lowest, and at least twenty years lower than that of all Afghanistan's neighbours. One in five children still die before the age of five, and the country has some of the world's lowest literacy rates. In addition, 3.4 million Afghans remain outside their country and there is much room for improvement in the country's human rights situation.

He accused the Opposition of being 'negative and opportunistic' in suggesting the government had pulled out of Afghanistan too soon in 2002, pointing out that the then leader, Simon Crean, had welcomed the decision at the time. And once again, he asked Australians to brace themselves: 'Afghanistan remains a dangerous place and any military operation

conducted there carries significant risks. The possibility of ADF casualties cannot be discounted.'

An advance party finally deployed two weeks later and the remaining 400 joined them in mid September.

*

The Dutch partnership began well, but points of tension soon emerged. Looking back on a partnership which ended in 2010, Angus Houston did not subscribe to some of the more negative views of the Dutch. 'I would characterise them as good partners,' Houston said. 'There were some differences in approach … It took us a little while to get used to working with each other but once we were over that, we were okay.'

Brendan Nelson believed what they brought to the partnership was invaluable. 'We are blessed to have worked with the Dutch,' Nelson said. 'They understand [the] culture.'

Within the Australian defence establishment, there was some residual grumbling that the Dutch tended to take credit for everything. On the Dutch side, they felt a bit the same about the Australians. 'The only bad feeling about the cooperation was that, if you visited Australia,' General Pieter Cobelens said, 'hardly anyone knew … or recognised the Dutch leadership.'

The Dutch forces had carriage of detainees, so that anyone the Australians arrested was handed over. But there was sensitivity about that in the Netherlands, too, because of strong public opposition to the US facility at Guantanamo Bay. In Afghanistan, some Dutch detainees were being held only for a short while and then released because there wasn't enough evidence to justify keeping them in custody. That led to grumblings in the Australian camp that it had become a 'catch and release' program. The noise would subside in 2010 when the Dutch withdrew, US forces took over, and the Australians took on their own detainee responsibility. Then,

they discovered how difficult it was to gather enough proof in rural Afghanistan to keep troublemakers behind bars.

There were differences of view on the way to run what's known as kinetic, or offensive, operations too. The frustrated Australians found some sympathy among other allies. 'The Dutch have performed well in the field, engaging and killing the enemy,' the US ambassador to The Hague warned in a cable, ahead of a visit by Dutch Foreign Minister Ben Bot to Washington in October 2006. 'That said, the Dutch continue to place a higher emphasis on hearts and minds reconstruction efforts than on the hunt for terrorists; combat missions have been largely reactive instead of proactive.'

The Canadians were more blunt. They accused the Dutch of lacking the guts to fight. They all understood that the Dutch government was facing an election on 22 November, and the always-fraught political atmosphere back home was more volatile than ever.

'We should not underestimate the level of public frustration with US policies, or the current government's hyper-sensitivity to criticism from a volatile and divided electorate,' the US cable said.

In March 2007, the differences between the Dutch and Australian militaries came to a head. The normally even-tempered Houston travelled to the Netherlands for a meeting with his counterpart, General Berlijn. Australia was putting more Special Forces into Uruzgan province and Houston planned to tell Berlijn that Australia wanted them to work alongside the US under the auspices of Operation Enduring Freedom and not as part of the ISAF. But the Dutch were not happy. Houston's trip had to be extended by a day as the two men held a special meeting in Roosendaal, a military town in the country's south and home to the Dutch Special Forces. Their extremely robust discussion was described variously as 'very terse' and 'a full-scale barney'. Australia also wanted the Dutch to do more fighting and there had been a great deal of private grumbling that they weren't much in the line of fire. But on the designation for the elite soldiers, Berlijn dug in. ISAF it was.

And as there often are when partners get together, there had been other things which had tested the friendship. Even in the military, little things can have a big impact and after a while, Australian soldiers in the joint Dutch-Australian base started to complain that they didn't like the food. 'I had to get some cooks over there pretty fast,' Brendan Nelson said in 2010. 'Our Special Forces, they like the smell of bacon and eggs in the morning.' The Dutch breakfast of pickled herrings wasn't to their taste. 'The first thing we did was provide supplementary rations,' Angus Houston said. 'So we used to fly in barbecues on a fairly regular basis. But it ended up they wanted that sort of food all of the time.'

Eventually, Australia took on the catering contract for the whole Tarin Kowt base, known as Kamp Holland. Instead of the reheat-only kitchen originally installed, it built a full kitchen where meals could be made from scratch. It cost $10 million. But it kept the soldiers happy.

13

THE LOYALTY CARD

IN 2006, AS HE was sending hundreds more young Australians off to war, John Howard was also thinking about his own future. He had been in office for a decade and dogged for years by speculation about his own political mortality. Ever since pondering out loud in a radio interview on his 61st birthday in 2000 about the possibility of retiring around the age of 64, on or near every birthday or anytime something arose about planning for future events, he would be asked in various ways when he was going to go.

Howard considered it foolish and ill-disciplined that he had ever discussed his future in public at all. He insisted later that, at the time, he wasn't really thinking about when he might call it a day and should never have entertained the question. Nonetheless, come 2006, he and wife Janette had formed a plan. When he eventually left office at the voters' insistence in 2007, Howard revealed that his 'working assumption' from early 2005 had been that he would bow out at the end of the following year.

Throughout 2005 and 2006 the man who wanted his job, Treasurer Peter Costello, remained unconvinced. In May 2005, Costello had hit the roof when Howard had casually answered an interview question in Athens, at the end of an 11-day, four-country tour, suggesting he could beat Opposition leader Kim Beazley at another election.

The response in the interview with News Ltd journalists Steve Lewis and Malcolm Farr became known as the Athens declaration. It was billed as confirmation that Howard had no intention of resigning. Stories about him staying drew headlines just as big as stories about him going, and this one caused all hell to break loose, politically, back home.

Howard believed his response should have been seen as innocuous. He had been perpetually on guard for tricky leadership questions ever since his

original on-air slip-up with broadcaster Philip Clark. He didn't think there should be a huge hullabaloo about responding to a question on whether he could 'best' Beazley a third time with the words: 'Yes. I hope so. Try.' But there was.

The interview had been Howard's final commitment before heading back to Australia on what had been a long trip. It had been my first as a television journalist and I was finding the transition challenging. We had begun in Beijing with official talks in the Great Hall of the People and gone on to Tokyo and Osaka, to visit the Australian pavilion at Expo 2005. Howard had then made a side trip back to China for a regional summit in the city of Boao and had taken an RAAF VIP jet direct to Canakkale, on the Gallipoli peninsula, for ANZAC Day and the 90th anniversary commemorations of the 1915 landings. It had been impossible for those of us trying to chase him to keep up on commercial flights, so most of the travelling media had left covering the Chinese summit to colleagues and had flown straight from Japan to Istanbul.

With a minivan and driver we took the road south to Canakkale. There, the hotel was groaning with ANZAC Day guests. It was so full, we were sleeping three to a room and we drew straws for who would be on the floor. Having gone across the Dardanelles to ANZAC Cove to film a preview as the sun set, I sat up late into the night finishing my story and recording my voice-over into the laptop while kneeling into the back of an armchair in the hallway at 3 am. From Turkey, we'd gone to Greece where much fuss was made of Australia's huge Greek diaspora. Howard and most of my colleagues were then, finally, heading home, but I was going on to London to cover the final week of the British elections.

A big leadership story was the last thing I felt like worrying about. You could say the same for Costello. He was dining with Fairfax journalists in Melbourne when Howard rang to warn him that his words were about to take on a life of their own. He tried to persuade Costello that it was no genuine indicator of his thinking on retirement. The treasurer didn't believe him. The incident became the backdrop to the events of the following year,

when Howard actually was thinking about departure. Costello has never believed it. As a result, two wars were being fought offshore and another one at home.

There were a few signs pointing in the direction of a Howard retirement, not least of which was his grand tour of Washington, Ottawa and Dublin in May 2006. At the White House, President Bush pulled out all the stops. There are grades of official visit and this one was off the top shelf. Howard got the works—the full red-carpet joint press conference in the East Room (a significant upgrade from remarks in the Oval Office or the Rose Garden) and flags, an honour guard and marching bands on the South Lawn.

There was a lot of tree-planting too. On the same lawn at the Australian ambassador's residence where he had committed Australia to war five years earlier—occupied in 2006 by a new ambassador, the former ASIO chief Dennis Richardson—Howard and Bush together planted a commemorative American elm. Then, at the Australian High Commisioner's residence in Ottawa, Howard planted a blue spruce in his own honour. Marked with a plaque denoting 'The Howard Tree', it was planted next to 'The Menzies Tree'. It all seemed to be pointing one way. On top of that, the *Daily Telegraph*'s Piers Akerman, known to be close to Howard's side of politics, had written a newspaper column speculating about a prime-ministerial retirement in December.

Howard's behaviour had also become a little nostalgic. Back home a few weeks later, addressing the press gallery's Midwinter Ball, he added to the speculation when he said he had enjoyed working with us all and would continue to do so 'in the coming weeks and months'. Why not years? It seemed an odd construct.

I mused over all this in my newspaper column shortly after, confessing to tea-leaf reading but venturing that Howard was behaving like he was considering skedaddling. The Sydney Institute's Gerard Henderson devoted part of his own column in August 2006 to disagreeing with me. 'The evidence suggests that the Prime Minister believes that the times will continue to suit him,' Henderson—a former Howard adviser—wrote. In

fact, the times had begun not to suit him at all, and if Howard didn't know it then, he did soon after.

But in 2006, he ended up digging in. Three weeks after the ball, it was revealed that to secure a clear run at the leadership a decade earlier, he'd promised Costello he would eventually hand over. Costello's unhappy protestations which followed the leaking of the agreement and Howard's view that his hand was being forced prompted him to change his mind. He would adopt a new form of words indicating that he would continue to lead while ever his party wanted him to and it was in its best interests that he do so. Ultimately, his refusal to be pushed would see him lose his own seat.

By November 2006, Howard's decision was further complicated by yet another upheaval in the Labor Party. After an initial burst of good polling, Kim Beazley's public ratings had slumped and there were mutterings about his leadership. His mishandling of a condolence message for Australian television personality Rove McManus, who had just lost his actor wife Belinda Emmett to breast cancer, drove home another of the truisms of politics: that seemingly small things can bring you undone. In making a set-piece statement about the tragedy on 17 November, Beazley substituted McManus' unusual first name for one with which he was clearly more familiar—that of Karl Rove, an adviser to the US President. Incredulous reporters winced as Beazley said:

> Today our thoughts and the thoughts of many, many Australians will be with Karl Rove as he goes through the very sad process of burying his beloved wife. And I just want him to know that my thoughts and the thoughts of my colleagues are very much with him today.

Later, with the death of the popular young actor and the grief of her equally popular husband receiving massive coverage nationwide, Beazley tried to clean up the unfortunate mess. He said that, of course, he had

misspoken and his message was meant for Rove McManus. ‘My thoughts are with him now just as they were this morning,’ Beazley insisted.

But for colleagues unhappy with his performance, it was the tipping point. Shadow foreign minister Kevin Rudd, who had contemplated running for the leadership when Latham defeated Beazley, began plotting. He did a deal with shadow health minister Julia Gillard to form an alternative team.

On Friday, 1 December 2006, Rudd announced his challenge. That night, Beazley was scheduled to be the guest speaker at the press gallery’s annual Christmas dinner at the National Press Club. To his great credit—and my great gratitude, as the gallery’s president and chief dinner organiser—he kept his appointment. He attempted a feisty speech but there was melancholy underneath.

On the following Monday morning, in what would doubtless become one of the worst days of his life, Beazley was defeated. When he left the caucus room after the ballot, he discovered that while he had been facing his political fate, his younger brother, David, had died suddenly in Perth.

Along with my colleagues, I sat in his subsequent news conference and watched the big man summon the strength to face the inevitable questions, including a solitary one about the morning’s personal tragedy. It was a remarkably stoic performance in the cruel circumstances of that day.

Sometime later, Beazley wrote me a personal note, saying he had appreciated the mutually courteous dealings in our respective roles and observing that the address he’d given on that Friday night had been his final official duty as Opposition leader. It reinforced my view of the fundamental decency of a man who would never get to be prime minister.

*

Having decided to stick around, Howard now faced a newly invigorated Labor opposition, a fresh, younger leader and soon enough, an election. Given all that, he examined the cards he held.

It had certainly been a messy 12 months. He had been forced to establish a commission of inquiry into the Australian Wheat Board's (AWB) activities in Iraq amid allegations it had paid kickbacks in breach of UN sanctions, and had, himself, ended up before it. The Cole Commission reported a few days before the Labor leadership change, finding no wrongdoing on the part of government ministers. The Australian Federal Police would begin investigating the possibility of charges against AWB executives but eventually drop the case, citing the low probability of a conviction.

The whole thing hadn't helped make Australians feel any more favourably towards the operation in Iraq, where Australian soldiers had handed over to Iraqi forces in al Muthanna and moved to Tallil in an overwatch role. 'Mercifully we hadn't suffered battle casualties,' he said in 2011, 'which was an amazing thing.'

While sentiment on Iraq had lost some of its sting and Australians seemed to accept having troops in Afghanistan, there was no great public love for either conflict. Howard knew that if soldiers were killed in either place that could change.

Having sent the Special Forces back to Afghanistan in 2005, he had wanted to withdraw them again after a year, arguing that they needed to be home in time for Australia's hosting of the APEC meeting in Sydney in September 2007. Usefully, that would also have had them home in time for the 2007 election—whoever was at the helm. But the monumental delay in settling the Dutch partnership and sending the PRT, together with the volatile situation in the country, meant they were still there. Howard privately lamented to others that he thought Afghanistan wasn't a vote-winner and he suspected most Australians didn't even know where it was.

In February 2007, he hosted his old friend US Vice President Dick Cheney on a visit to Australia. 'Dick, you're very welcome, you're a good friend,' Howard said at their joint news conference in Sydney. They spoke about their two wars. Cheney was forceful in his praise of Australia:

> America's proud to count Australia as a skilled and a decisive ally. We have much yet to do in Afghanistan and Iraq to defeat freedom's enemies and to consolidate the gains for democracy … History has set a good deal of work in front of us and none of it is easy, yet together we compose one of the world's great alliances, a broad and successful partnership based on deep respect, shared values and great strength used to good purposes, and we look forward to the future with confidence.

He reserved a good deal of praise for Howard himself and noted he was about to pass the 11-year mark in office:

> He has certainly borne up well under what Sir Robert Menzies called the hammering of the times. John Howard's integrity, his good counsel and his optimistic spirit have only strengthened the warm friendship between our two countries and have added to our effectiveness in the cause of freedom and security. These have been crowded and decisive years during which all of the world has come to know John Howard as a man of wisdom and character. For myself and for my country I want to express our gratitude to the Prime Minister for his friendship and for the leadership he's brought to our world.

There had been points of tension, not least the US tardiness in fulfilling a promise of access to its intelligence. Before Howard's 2006 visit, then Australian embassy official Andrew Shearer recalled it as a problem.

> Howard wrote [to President Bush] before that visit and said, "Look, there's one issue that I'd really rather not have to discuss with you and that is that this problem still hasn't been fixed"… It did meet this bureaucratic "Iron Colonel" resistance … Bush was

> duly annoyed with the bureaucracy and he sort of smashed heads together and it was sorted out.

There remained one other point of difficulty: the lagging military justice process for Guantanamo Bay inmates. Howard explained alongside Cheney that he had raised Australia's concerns about the progress of the trial of David Hicks. Asked about the delay, Cheney explained that the foundation for the US military commissions lay in precedents from both the US Civil War in the 1860s and the period after World War II when commissions had been established to try Germans who had worked for the Nazis.

Whereas the US Supreme Court of the time had upheld the World War II process, it had taken a different view 50 years later on the post-September 11 commissions. Cheney insisted the problem had now been legislated away, that Hicks would be 'at the head of the queue' and, if convicted, would be able to serve any balance of time in Australia.

Howard saw the Hicks case in political terms. He did not want this problem lingering for the election and needed it fixed. Despite his own disdain for Hicks and belief that the man had not exactly been 'on some hitchhiking tour' in Afghanistan, he was conscious that the case had begun to galvanise his critics in Australia.

Hicks' savvy US military-appointed lawyer, Major Michael Mori, had also been successfully drumming up sympathy for his client in Australia, creating a sense that the government was not doing enough for one of its own citizens. In fact, it had been lobbying—but always from the standpoint of believing Hicks was guilty. Politically, he was not afforded a presumption of innocence.

Howard would eventually succeed in getting the Hicks case heard first. The inmate's guilty plea—which he subsequently said was only made to get himself home—would see him transferred to South Australia's Yatala Prison in May and released on 29 December 2007.

*

In March 2007, Howard made his second visit to Afghanistan and I made my first.

A week or so before the Prime Minister flew to Tarin Kowt, five colleagues and I from four different media organisations flew to Kandahar from Kuwait on a media tour with the ADF. We had arrived from Darwin on a defence sustainment flight after completing a confronting questionnaire about birthmarks and scars in case anything made us hard to identify and, in my case, drafting a will. We were transferred to a C-130 Hercules with just enough time to receive a quick safety briefing and collect body armour and a large special-issue adhesive bandage. The latter was to help seal a sucking chest wound should any of us, or anyone with us, happen to sustain one during our stay.

It was a lengthy flight along the Persian Gulf and the defensive spiral landing into Kandahar Air Field rendered us all very quiet. It's hard not to be tense arriving in a war zone. We were taken to our quarters in the 'transit lines', huge, steel-framed tents like wedding marquees with concrete floors and rows of bunks sleeping upwards of one hundred each.

Given that we numbered only seven, including the naval officer who was our permanent escort, we weren't short of space. After a sobering briefing about sirens and rocket attacks and being ready to run to the bunker across the way, I went to bed fully clothed and barely slept. Within a few days I realised the only way to not live in a permanent state of sleepless terror was to lay out everything where I could grab it quickly, assure myself I knew exactly what to do and leave the rest to fate. After that, I slept better.

We flew from there to Tarin Kowt, strapped into the back of an enormous US C-17 aircraft alongside a very large armoured vehicle which was chained to the floor but looked like it could slide sideways and crush us at any moment.

We spent most of what became about ten days in Afghanistan behind the wire of these two military bases, talking to carefully selected Australian troops and being shown what they were doing.

But one morning we joined a convoy of armoured vehicles on a day trip ‘outside the wire’ as the soldiers called it, to a village in the Barakzai region where the Reconstruction Task Force was to renovate a local mosque. The route had been checked for explosive devices. It was a big operation, involving dozens of vehicles and many personnel. The village and valley in which it sat were like something out of the middle ages: compounds of mud buildings sitting in a wide, flat expanse with jagged mountains at the rim. Some of the SAS soldiers who travelled through country like this in 2001 described it as ‘biblical’. ‘Except what gave it away was the satellite dishes on the dirt huts,’ one said.

Here there were no dishes nor any evidence of electricity or even running water. In the fields behind the buildings, grew a healthy opium crop. As we walked into the village with the soldiers, two little girls approached, clad in emerald green head scarves with black kohl around their eyes. When they got close, they were amazed to find that one of these helmeted visitors in blue body armour was a woman. The only other visible woman in the vicinity was a US official wearing a flak jacket and a handgun on her hip. There were no village women around at all, only robed men in dark turbans, young boys and these two little girls in green.

When we set up the television camera, the locals lined up to peer through the lens, like it was some kind of magic. The girls were extremely shy and ran away whenever I came near. Eventually, I won their confidence for long enough to take their picture from the other side of a low mud wall before they scampered off.

A little while later, we went back at our makeshift camp; several armoured vehicles parked in a circle in the middle of the valley while a row of others, with sentries on guard, overlooked from the ridges above. As we stood around having a cuppa, three women appeared in the distance with one of the little girls. Each covered head to foot in a burqa, they were glancing sideways in our direction as they hurried along the dirt track which cut through the valley to the village.

I left all the blokes drinking their tea and took a few steps away from the camp, into the treeless landscape. As the women passed in front of me about 50 metres away, one of them turned slightly. Without warning, a hand popped out through her robe and the fingers flapped frantically at waist height. Careful to keep the gesture out of sight of the male goatherds who were grazing their animals a little way behind me, she was saying hello. In the middle of a war, I felt the rush of tears. Equally wary of drawing disapproval from a wandering goatherd, I carefully waved back. No words passed between us, nor will they ever, but for a stranger from a different place and what felt like a different time, it was an unforgettable, tiny moment of solidarity among women. They seemed to be laughing as they hurried away.

*

A couple of days later, we were preparing to be picked up by C-130 Hercules and flown out of Afghanistan when our plans were changed. Something was going on which meant the aircraft was no longer available, but nobody would say what. We were taken to the airstrip to wait for transport, although what kind, and to where, wasn't entirely clear. After a while spent enjoying the wind whipping off the snowy peaks, we were moved to a helipad and told we were going by Chinook helicopter back south to Kandahar. Duration of stay: unknown.

When the chopper landed, we were to run with all our gear straight out to the aircraft, have it stacked into the racks up the middle and strap ourselves in. There would be no mucking around. It wasn't going to be on the ground for more than a few minutes.

My SBS cameraman colleague, Jamie Kidston, climbed into the harness beside the rear gunner on the edge of the open ramp to film out the back as we took what we'd been warned would be a hair-raising flight. The other cameraman with us, Jeff Kehl from Channel Nine in Darwin, would later join our SBS bureau in Canberra.

We had another Chinook behind us and an Apache gunship as a security escort as we flew low over the landscape, skimming the ridges in order to stay a fast-moving target and harder to fix on from the ground. At one point, the helicopter's anti-missile alert system detected we were being tracked and sent out spectacular flares to divert any heat-seeking trouble.

What we didn't know until later was that some apparently lone gunman had, separately, taken a potshot at us with a rocket-propelled grenade. He—assuming it was a he—missed, and nobody in any of the helicopters even saw it. It wasn't until Kidston was reviewing his camera tape on the ground, that he noticed a flash and showed the rest of us. He'd been concentrating so hard on holding the camera still in the wind, he hadn't seen what he had filmed.

We notified the commander who confirmed it as an RPG. An official report, dated 12 March 2007, released among the Wikileaks Afghan War Diary documents in 2010, recorded the event.

> The projectile moved from the right front to the rear of the CH47 at low trajectory. At the moment the RPG was fired, the helicopter happened to be climbing in order to reach the crest of the ridgeline. No crew or passengers witnessed any muzzle flash or even noticed the engagement.

I have reflected on the experience since. It's a strange feeling not knowing you were under fire until it's all over. The incident happened just days after colleagues and friends were killed and terribly injured in the crash of a Garuda Airlines jet in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. That we were so lucky when they were not is something I cannot reconcile.

If our experience might have been off-putting to some journalists, it had the reverse effect on Kidston. Two months later, he quit his job at SBS and went back to Afghanistan to work as a cameraman for NATO. Two years after that, he was shot in the arm while on patrol with Canadian and Afghan

forces. The incident still didn’t diminish his enthusiasm for filming combat, and after recuperating at home he went back and continued his work.

*

On arrival in Kandahar, we discovered the reason for the sudden scarcity of Australian C-130s. With the usual secrecy, John Howard had flown into Afghanistan on a parallel visit, going where we had just been—just after we had been taken somewhere else. For a political correspondent, being at the same war as the Prime Minister but not in the same place was somewhat frustrating.

Howard had a minor hair-raising experience of his own, when he flew on from Afghanistan to Iraq. The take-off from Tallil was aborted when the cabin filled with smoke and he and the other occupants of the Hercules were quickly evacuated.

His trip—which required a spare aircraft too—meant that back in Afghanistan, we had to wait a little longer for a lift. We spent five days at the Kandahar Air Field and defence kept us on a frustratingly short leash. Happily, there was a coffee shop just down the gravel road from our quarters, next to the British general store. Inside, it looked for all the world like a certain American chain except with racks for the rifles. We paid them so many visits they gave me a loyalty card.

*

When Howard returned from the Middle East, he sat down with the NSC. The security situation in Afghanistan had been deteriorating and after talks with President Karzai in Kabul and separate talks between the military chiefs of Australia, the Netherlands, the US and Britain, the Prime Minister’s hopes of a straightforward, short Special Forces deployment were fading. They would have to send more.

On 10 April 2007, he announced the increase. ‘We will send very shortly to Uruzgan province a Special Operations Task Group of some 300 personnel and they’ll operate under Australian national command as part of … the International Security Assistance Force,’ Howard said. It would be a mixed group from the SAS, Commando and Incident Response regiments.

> Their role will be to enhance provincial security by disrupting Taliban command and control supply routes and they’ll directly support the Australian reconstruction taskforce. The existing 120-strong protection company group will be extended and it will continue to provide close protection to the RTF personnel until August of 2008. In addition we are sending, separately from this force, a radar protection surveillance group of the RAAF, some 75 personnel, to Kandahar Airfield and they will assume control of a portion of Afghan international airspace from the middle of this year.

They were also sending an extra C-130 Hercules aircraft. All up, it was a big boost. It also completed the transition from operating under the American Operation Enduring Freedom to being part of the NATO-led ISAF.

Howard said that by mid-2008, the number of Australian personnel in Afghanistan would peak at about 1000. Howard was starting to face questions about the decision in 2002 to withdraw and the ongoing failure to capture Osama bin Laden. ‘He’s obviously got a lot of friends in a lot of caves and a lot of places to escape to,’ Howard said.

Labor’s arguments were also taking root. Labor MPs now routinely referred to Afghanistan as ‘terror central’. ‘From that point on, Afghanistan always became a point of reference back to criticism of the government over Iraq,’ former Labor leader Kim Beazley said. Over and over Labor attacked the government’s decision to go to war in Iraq at the expense of what it said was the real fight.

Howard did not accept the characterisation: ‘If it’s good enough, and justified enough and desirable that we deny the terrorists a victory in Afghanistan, why isn’t it equally good enough, desirable enough and wise enough to deny the terrorists a victory in Iraq?’

But Australians didn’t seem to think it was. As the year wore on, public opinion ran increasingly against John Howard. The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation group meeting in September, supposed to be a great Australian showcase, only drew that into the spotlight, with the arrival of President George W. Bush.

‘You, Mr President, and I have shared a number of very special experiences over the past few years,’ Howard told Bush publicly after their talks in Sydney. Again, he referred to his own Washington visit, six years earlier.

> I remember our first personal meeting was on the 10th of September of 2001. And of course, as a consequence of that meeting and the events that horrifically followed … the paths of our two countries have been parallel in so many ways, in the fight against terrorism and the promotion of democracy and freedom around the world.

Howard confirmed Australia’s commitment to Iraq: ‘Australian forces will remain at their present levels in Iraq not based on any calendar, but based on conditions in the ground.’

Bush mentioned Afghanistan but as one of the two theatres where they were jointly fighting ‘the war on terror’. Iraq was his focus. He called Howard courageous and visionary:

> One thing that’s really important when it comes to international diplomacy is when a leader tells you something, he means it. And the thing I appreciate about dealing with Prime Minister Howard

> is that, one, you know where he stands, you don't have to try to read nuance into his words. And then when he tells you something, he stands by his word. And I thank you for that.

But there was a different pledge by which Howard most definitely wasn't standing—the one made to Peter Costello in 1995. Behind the APEC veil, the government was in crisis over Howard's leadership. Ministers were meeting in a hotel room to decide if they should tell him to go. He would eventually stare them down, relying on the second part of his post-2006 leadership mantra. While some wanted him to go but he insisted it wasn't in their best interests to go to an election with Costello as leader. He portrayed it as devotion to his party. Many didn't see it that way.

It was the beginning of the end for the Howard government. Nothing was going right. Opposition leader Kevin Rudd upstaged Howard at APEC by addressing the Chinese President, Hu Jintao, and his delegation in Mandarin, leaving Howard and his Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, reaching for their headsets to hear the translation.

Rudd and his supporters were also storming the airwaves with their catchy Kevin 07 slogan, contrasting themselves with Howard on Iraq and climate change policy and promising an apology to indigenous Australians over historical government wrongs. Labor had recruited a celebrity candidate, former ABC broadcaster Maxine McKew, to run against Howard in his own seat.

And as things worsened for the Prime Minister at home, they worsened in Afghanistan, too. On 8 October, 41-year-old Trooper David Pearce became the first Australian soldier to die in Afghanistan in more than five years.

Six days after the trooper's death, Howard called the 2007 election. On the third day of the campaign, 17 October, he and Kevin Rudd attended his funeral in Brisbane. Trooper Pearce's father, Edward, said his son was no reluctant soldier. 'What do I tell them if you don't come back?' the father had asked the son, as he prepared for his first and only deployment. 'He

said: “Tell them, I’m not being sent, I want to go. I’m doing what I want to do.”’

It would not be the last funeral of the election campaign. On 25 October, the ADF lost another soldier, 33-year-old Sergeant Matthew Locke, who was shot in a battle with insurgents in the Chora Valley. For a second time, the political leaders suspended campaigning, as Locke was laid to rest in Perth’s Karrakatta Cemetery. The leaders’ wives, Janette Howard and Therese Rein, also attended.

Locke had been awarded the Medal for Gallantry the previous year and was killed not far from where he earned it. Howard had met the young patrol commander before. As always, he felt the weight of the soldier’s death:

> I think about it a lot because I’m the person in the end who sends men and women into battle. I feel a very direct responsibility for any death or injury that occurs on the field of battle and it’s the greatest burden that anybody has to carry and discharge.

The alternative prime minister and his wife felt it too and both wept during the service. Senior military officers were glad for the sign from these leaders that ‘it hurts them’ to bury young Australians.

They would not be the last.

14

THE RED LINE

ON SATURDAY, 24 NOVEMBER 2007, Australia elected a Labor government, with Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister. Part of Rudd's election platform was to expand Australia's commitment in Afghanistan and pull the combat troops out of Iraq.

The new Prime Minister appointed New South Wales MP Joel Fitzgibbon to the defence minister's post—a reward for Fitzgibbon's support during the leadership challenge a year earlier which had toppled Kim Beazley. He gave the foreign affairs job to a West Australian, long-time MP and former adviser to Paul Keating, Stephen Smith. The urbane Smith, who had a fondness for Zegna suits like his old boss, had no diplomatic experience. It was a point the US embassy in Canberra noted when reporting back to Washington on the changes.

'It is probable that the real foreign minister will be Kevin Rudd himself, a micromanager and former diplomat who was Labor's spokesperson for foreign policy,' ambassador Robert McCallum wrote in a cable on 29 November. He had noted in another missive 18 months before the election that Rudd was 'hard-working, smart and serious' and could speak Mandarin but did not share the 'affable' qualities of a Bob Hawke. 'His ability to connect with average Australians will be a big question in the lead-up to the 2007 elections.'

Securing a whopping almost-6-per-cent swing, Rudd had answered the question resoundingly. But less than three years later it would be asked again, before he'd even finished his first term.

Washington had a considerable interest in these personnel changes in Canberra. Labor had a chequered recent history on the US alliance and the Latham period had not done much for relations with the US government.

Beazley had been a staunch defender and Rudd would likely also be, although previously he had given ‘a candid description’ of where Labor’s views differed from the US. But before regaining the leadership, Beazley too had spoken publicly about the need for Australia to occasionally challenge its bigger ally as, he said, friends needed to be able to do.

Rudd and his ministry were sworn in on 3 December. The new Opposition also had a new leader. Reeling from defeat after 11 years in office and shocked that John Howard himself had lost his seat, the Liberal–National Coalition elected former Defence Minister Dr Brendan Nelson to lead. A medical doctor by training, Nelson had entered politics at the 1996 election after a controversial tussle which saw him wrest pre-selection for the safe Liberal seat of Bradfield from incumbent David Connolly. Nelson had previously mused publicly over which of the major parties to join, something which doesn’t go over well with loyalists on either side. But he had made his choice, been accepted, won the right to contest Bradfield and then won the seat itself. Now, he found himself at the Liberal Party’s helm.

The often-magnanimous Nelson congratulated Rudd on his election. ‘I think a lot of Queenslanders—perhaps even those who voted for the Liberal or National Party at the election—also would feel a sense of pride in the sense that you have a Queenslander living in the Lodge,’ he said at the time.

*

As soon as he was elected, Rudd knew a melancholy duty would be among his first as Prime Minister. Commando Private Luke Worsley was killed the night before the election in a raid on a suspected Taliban bomb-making compound in Uruzgan province. Twenty-six-year-old Private Worsley had been leading when the Australian commandos stormed the compound in a planned operation to disrupt the Taliban’s production of explosives. In the burst of gunfire which met his arrival, Worsley took bullets to the chest. The noise alerted those behind him and probably saved their lives. He died instantly.

The day after he became Prime Minister, Rudd along with Fitzgibbon and Nelson joined more than a thousand mourners at St Andrew's Cathedral in Sydney, as Worsley's brother-in-law read from the famous anonymous poem, 'The Final Inspection', about a soldier's meeting with God. After finishing his commando training at Singleton, in New South Wales, Worsley had sent a copy to his father.

> Step forward now, you soldier,
> You've borne your burdens well.
> Walk peacefully on Heaven's streets,
> You've done your time in Hell.

*

Just over a week later, and 11 days into his new job, Joel Fitzgibbon went to Edinburgh to a meeting of defence ministers from countries with troops in Afghanistan. It was a NATO meeting and Australia was in a strange inside-outside sort of position: part of the International Security Assistance Force which was mostly NATO countries, but not part of NATO itself.

The new minister had just read his incoming brief and was interested—even surprised—to hear, over the opening dinner at Edinburgh Castle, how well everyone thought things were going at the war. The almost-46-year-old Fitzgibbon was a person who liked to speak his mind. He was not afraid of confrontation—something which would quickly rub some senior Australian defence officials up the wrong way.

It didn't matter to him that he had only just started in his job. When it came to Australia's views on Afghanistan, he was determined not to be a wallflower. He thought all this optimistic, rosy talk was hogwash, although that's not quite the word he would use. And besides, Kevin Rudd had sent him to Edinburgh with a specific message to deliver. In Rudd's view, colourfully expressed to some visiting Americans later that year, some of the bigger European countries, such as France and Germany, were doing

little more up in the safe north-west of Afghanistan than ‘organising folk-dancing festivals’. They should be doing more.

The morning after the Edinburgh Castle dinner, Joel Fitzgibbon went in to a meeting of countries with forces in the southern provinces as part of Regional Command South. He was prepared to listen. What he heard was more of the optimistic gee-up from the night before.

> As the new boy, I sat there quietly and patiently for a while, waiting for what I thought was the right time to intervene, I told them I totally disagreed with their assessment. I proceeded to tell them that, in our view, the whole thing was dysfunctional. The planning was hopeless, some countries were not pulling their weight, we lacked coordination and we even lacked a clearly defined mission statement.

As Fitzgibbon spoke to the NATO gathering, he caught members of the British delegation looking at each and rolling their eyes as if the newcomer was going to be a ‘problem child’.

Fitzgibbon argued that some European countries should be doing more and until they did, they shouldn’t expect Australia to increase its numbers, then at almost 1000. At morning tea, the US Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, sought him out and seemed supportive of what he’d said. Fitzgibbon felt that Gates was not averse to someone else giving a few European allies a bit of a kick. He was right. Not only was Gates not averse, he had known Fitzgibbon was going to do it.

Kevin Rudd had briefed the US ambassador to Australia, Robert McCallum, on what Fitzgibbon would say, and it had been reported back to the State Department and the Pentagon. It reflected the US’ own views about the wobbliness of the Europeans’ commitment, which had been shared with an Australian official just a day after the new Australian ministry had been sworn in.

The US Under Secretary of State, William Burns, had held trilateral talks in Canberra with the Secretary of the Foreign Affairs department, Michael L'Estrange, and a Japanese counterpart, Deputy Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka, on 4 and 5 December 2007.

In a cable back to Washington, the US embassy reported the view Burns had conveyed. 'Afghanistan had become an existential crisis for NATO, at odds with the "one for all and all for one" credo,' it said, in an apparent reference to the British self-description of it and other key NATO partners as the 'three musketeers'. Burns had described the Edinburgh conference, coming up just over a week later, as an opportunity 'to keep countries in the fight'.

In response, L'Estrange had given a downbeat Australian assessment of the situation in Afghanistan. 'The training of the army was behind schedule, many in the police force were corrupt and Pakistan's current preoccupation with domestic political matters distracted it from dealing with insurgents along its border with Afghanistan,' the cable reported L'Estrange as having told his US visitor.

He had questioned 'the capacity of the Afghan government to maintain security and deliver assistance' and raised concerns about its desire to 'engage elements of the insurgency'. 'We needed to avoid any perception of weakness. Handled in the wrong way, this situation could undermine the coalition.'

But the Foreign Affairs Secretary, who under John Howard had served as Secretary to Cabinet and later high commissioner to London, told Burns that despite the pessimism, the Australian government remained committed. 'In fact, the new government's commitment was even stronger perhaps than former PM Howard's,' the cable quoted L'Estrange as saying.

Returning from Edinburgh a few weeks earlier, Fitzgibbon had taken his own more public swing at Labor's predecessors.

> The previous government would have us believe that good progress is being made in Afghanistan. The reality is quite a

> different one … We are winning the battles and not the war, in my view. We have been very successful in clearing areas of the Taliban but it's having no real strategic effect.

He said it was like stomping on ants but leaving the nest:

> We need much more than a military response. This is largely about winning the hearts and minds of the more moderate of the Taliban and other sections of the Afghan community. We need more political advisers in the civil service. There is no administrative infrastructure. We need more training for the Afghan army and the Afghan police. We need someone there as a senior envoy coordinating this overall strategy.

It was a fair indicator of the government's thinking and a post-election sign it was changing direction. But first, the new Prime Minister wanted to see the battlefield for himself. Fitzgibbon returned home just in time to accompany Rudd on an unannounced trip to the Middle East.

They visited the 550-strong Australian contingent at Tallil, in Iraq, and Rudd confirmed to the soldiers that he intended to keep his election promise and withdraw them by mid-year. Standing beneath the Great Ziggurat of Ur, the ancient Mesopotamian temple pyramid from the 21st century BC, Rudd asked them if there were any questions. Yes, one said. When are you going to finish the Ipswich motorway? As he replied outlining the development plan for Queensland road transport in the dust of southern Iraq, Rudd thought: *That's very Australian.*

Flying on to Baghdad, he saw the Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, US commander David Petraeus and US ambassador Ryan Crocker. From there, it was along the Persian Gulf, staying clear of Iran, and in over Pakistan to the Afghan capital, Kabul. Rudd addressed Australian troops at the air base there. 'I fear what the new year might bring,' he said. 'But our advice and our conviction is that this is a job worth doing.'

He saw President Karzai and announced that Australia would double aid to Afghanistan. And he used a familiar turn of phrase: ‘Australia is here in Afghanistan for a long haul.’ He didn’t say what that meant. At the end of that year he would tell US diplomats that Afghanistan “scares the hell” out of him.

*

It was late January before any of the new ministers made it to Washington. Stephen Smith was first. On 28 January 2008, Smith was working hard to allay any residual concerns within the US administration about the Labor government. At a joint news conference after talks with the Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, at the State Department, Smith said:

> The meeting underlined the fundamental importance of the alliance between Australia and the United States. This is an alliance which has served both nations well for over half a century, forged in the context of World War II and, I’m always proud to say, forged by Labor Prime Minister John Curtin at a time of Australia’s greatest peril.

Rice had already offered a reassuring emphasis on the two countries’ ‘deep and long-lasting ties’. Smith was asked directly how the Rudd government’s approach would differ from its predecessor’s, specifically regarding withdrawing forces from Iraq. Smith said:

> The basis and the nature of the alliance between Australia and the United States transcends governments and administrations. It’s supported by the spectrum of politics in Australia and in the United States so administrations come and go, governments come and go, but the fundamental, underlying, indispensable nature of the Australia-US alliance continues.

Both chief diplomats were also watching their counterparts in the Afghan government closely. Doubts were beginning to emerge about its capabilities and about President Karzai himself. In the previous 24 hours, Karzai had rejected the proposed appointment of Briton Paddy Ashdown as a UN envoy, allegedly because of the assertive reputation Ashdown had earned undertaking a similar role in Bosnia.

Rice chose her words carefully in response: ‘The United States is sorry that this couldn’t be worked out because we need strong leadership in the international community, and the international community, it seems to me, is ready to accept strong leadership so that we can better support the Afghan government.’ The implication was that Karzai himself wasn’t providing it.

As his colleague Joel Fitzgibbon had done before Christmas, Smith indicated the Australian government was taking a long look at the mission in Afghanistan. It was clearly preparing to strike out in a new direction. Smith revealed that he and his colleagues were considering the existing aid, civilian training, infrastructure, governance, the capacity-building contributions, with a view to doing more.

The government stuck to part of the previous government’s timetable though, announcing on 8 February that two more Chinook CH-47 helicopters had been sent to Afghanistan with an advance party to Kandahar. The associated personnel, which the Coalition had estimated would total 110, left from Townsville that day. This was a new rotation after the helicopter deployment had been wound up the previous April to allow for rest and repairs. The aircraft had been fitted with new ballistics detection systems and better communications equipment. The minister left the announcement to his parliamentary secretary, Mike Kelly. Fitzgibbon was away preparing for another NATO showdown.

By the time he reached the summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, he was even angrier than before. As he was leaving Australia, Fitzgibbon had asked Defence to make sure the draft summit papers were among his reading material for the flight. He was told: ‘Oh no, Minister, we don’t have access

to those. We're not members of NATO.' Fitzgibbon recalls releasing a few expletives, and saying, 'Well, we will now.'

In Kabul, Australian officers seconded to ISAF headquarters had access to the same material as everyone else. But that wasn't the case at the political level. The government didn't only want to be told what was happening—it wanted to be involved in deciding.

In Vilnius, Fitzgibbon again spoke his mind. Again, the first meeting involved the countries from ISAF's Regional Command South. He protested about Australia's exclusion from strategic decision-making:

> I went off my head in there. 'Here we are, the largest non-NATO contributor, losing lives there. You guys want us to continue to put our boys' lives on the line but you don't want us to be part of the planning process. This is ridiculous. We won't stand for it.'

After that meeting, the ministers were to head into a bigger gathering of all ISAF countries, just across the hall. Fitzgibbon noticed the Dutch Defence Minister, Eimert van Middelkoop, rushing ahead of him to warn fellow Dutchman and NATO Secretary-General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, that the Australian was not happy. By the time the cranky minister reached his seat, the Secretary-General was beside him, trying to smooth things over and assuring him that something would be done. Out of respect for de Hoop Scheffer, Fitzgibbon toned down his next intervention—a bit: 'I think it was still pretty aggressive.'

But, eventually, Fitzgibbon got his way and Australia was given a proper seat at NATO's ISAF table. The minister believed the Howard government should have insisted on it. He told ABC Radio after the meeting:

> I'm frankly very surprised and disappointed that the former government was making decisions to send our men and women to war and to keep them at war without having a seat at the decision-making table—basically doing so on a no-questions-

> asked basis. A government can't make informed decisions about whether to send our people to war … if it doesn't have information about the strategy and therefore can't make an assessment about the prospect of success.

Getting greater access to NATO was something Fitzgibbon would consider one of the achievements of his tenure. He also developed a good relationship with his US counterpart Robert Gates and did not sense any hostility from the bigger ally for the way he went about getting what he wanted.

But his bullish approach to international engagement did not endear him to the Defence hierarchy. This was not the way things were normally done. He was a different kind of minister than the Defence Force had known under the previous government, and not just for his personality. He was also not a pre-retiree. Ambition naturally attracts attention and a year later, Fitzgibbon would get a lot more than he wanted.

*

In the very early days of the Rudd government, the ministers on Cabinet's National Security Committee were examining the Afghanistan mission. They couldn't actually figure out what it was. Rudd confronted officials across the departments. If the mission was creeping, he said, it had to be creeping from somewhere. Could somebody tell him where? The realisation that nobody seemed much able to say exactly what Australia was trying to achieve in Afghanistan became the starting point for reworking its commitment.

But the process was complicated in early February 2008 by a drama in East Timor which would further stretch Australia's resources. On 11 February, East Timorese rebel soldiers broke into the home of President Jose Ramos-Horta in Dili. Ramos-Horta was shot and wounded and rebel

Alfredo Renaido was killed. Elsewhere in Dili, Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao escaped injury when his convoy was attacked.

In the wake of the incidents, the Timorese leadership asked Australia to send more soldiers and police to help restore calm. Cabinet obliged. But that meant Australia was actively engaged in yet another theatre of operations; there were troops in the Solomon Islands, too—something which had to be considered when planning to recast the size or shape of the Afghan deployment.

These were an intense few days for the Rudd government. On 13 February, the first day of Parliament, the new Prime Minister delivered a national apology to indigenous Australians removed from their families under past government welfare policy. The outpouring of emotion dominated the national media and the word ‘sorry’ hung—quite literally, thanks to a skywriter above Parliament House—in the air. The day after the apology, Rudd flew to Timor to show support.

When he returned, the NSC put the finishing touches to the new Afghan operation. Joel Fitzgibbon announced the change of emphasis in a ministerial statement to Parliament after Question Time on 19 February. He said the war was at a crossroads and the stakes were high. The government was not sending more troops but it was changing what they would do. It would continue with reconstruction but the new emphasis was on training. Fitzgibbon told the House:

> We are making these changes with an eye on the longer term future of the country, noting that the government of Afghanistan needs to be able to develop the security forces which will provide the security for their own citizens into the future. The adjustments to Australia’s military commitment will be focused on enhancing the capabilities of the Afghan National Army while retaining our reconstruction and combat effort in Uruzgan.

He also flagged a boost to the civilian element of Australia's commitment, but that would come later. For now, this was about the military role. Far from unscrambling what the Howard government had done, the Rudd government was whipping it into something new: OMLiTs, or Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams. ISAF had been operating them elsewhere in Afghanistan and now Australia would establish its own in Uruzgan.

Australian troop training teams would be embedded within Afghan army battalions of about 600 men, called kandaks, with a view to raising what would be known as the Fourth Brigade. The Afghan troops' lack of skill would make them vulnerable to attack. For the Australians, that made this more dangerous work. But the government believed it was necessary. It had decided that training local troops to take over security was the only way it could ever hope to get Australian forces out.

*

While the NSC was setting in place its new long-term exit strategy, there was another withdrawal to deal with first. Kevin Rudd had promised before the election to pull troops out of Iraq, and he was determined to do it.

Despite the Coalition government having accused the Labor Opposition before the election of planning to 'cut and run' from Iraq, it was becoming increasingly clear that a re-elected Howard government would have done the same thing.

In late February 2008, senior Liberal MP Andrew Robb said there had been talks on that issue the previous year. He told ABC television's *Insiders* program:

> We had already started discussions with the Americans on that front. In August last year, and during the campaign, John Howard quite explicitly—and [the then foreign minister] Alexander Downer explicitly—talked about [how] a time would come this

year when we would start to replace combat troops with training troops.

But it was Kevin Rudd who won the election and would be pulling them out. The withdrawal was no surprise to the US. The previous day Rudd, Fitzgibbon and Smith had talks with the US Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, and Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte.

But Rudd had confirmed his intentions to the Americans well before that. A week after being sworn in, at Rudd's invitation, US ambassador Robert McCallum had called on him at his Brisbane home. Whenever there's a new prime minister, the current US ambassador is always one of the first to drop by. In a cable to Washington after the Brisbane meeting, McCallum said Rudd had confirmed that he was planning an Iraq withdrawal but assured the Americans that Australia would be 'leaving other stuff there' after combat troops left.

The Mandarin-speaking Prime Minister had also hinted at an emissary-type role for himself with China, saying he wouldn't mind a dialogue with the US on 'what would be useful in the future'. He would follow through on all of this in talks at the White House in March.

*

After his dash to Timor, Rudd's first scheduled trip abroad in late March was a three-week monster, dotted with firsts and heavy with controversy. It included a visit to the White House in Washington, the UN in New York (and back to Washington), a swing through European Union headquarters in Brussels, a NATO summit in Bucharest, Romania, a few days in London seeing Queen Elizabeth II and Prime Minister Gordon Brown, meetings with the Chinese leadership in Beijing and, finally, a regional summit in Sanya, China's southernmost city on the Hainan Peninsula.

The least of the firsts was that it was the first time since the previous Labor government that journalists had travelled on RAAF aircraft abroad,

still as paying passengers but not having to chase the Prime Minister across the world hopping bad connections on commercial aircraft.

The change had come in the wake of the terrible air crash in Indonesia which had killed and injured our colleagues the year before. Rudd had promised at the time that he would do his best to help media representatives avoid having to use airlines with dubious safety records.

Under Hawke and Keating, Prime Minister and media alike had flown together in a single aircraft from a fleet of air force Boeing 707s, which in more recent years had fallen victim to noise pollution laws and general wear and tear. We always thought the 707 was pretty good, not least because it served a very fine Penfolds red wine that nobody could otherwise afford. In the early days of the Hawke government, the wine served on the plane was Grange Hermitage (seriously), some enterprising government official having stocked up on heaven-knows-how-many cases of the stuff many years before at a, presumably, rather reduced rate. By the time I was senior enough to travel, the Grange supply had been exhausted and they had moved down to the next best thing: the aircraft's namesake, Penfolds Bin 707. It was still mighty pricey wine and I remember being gobsmacked at what seemed, literally, like the very high life.

But there were more important firsts on Rudd's visit than those relating to our trip on the RAAF jet. These were of a diplomatic nature. In China, Rudd would seriously ruffle feathers among the leadership by going virtually straight from the plane to Beijing University and delivering a speech in Mandarin promoting human rights for Tibet. He would then ruffle more feathers in Japan, by not going there on this trip at all.

In Washington, President Bush turned on a generous welcome for his first meeting with Rudd as Prime Minister with a joint press conference in the East Room and some good-natured banter. They lauded the state of the alliance. Bush said:

> One thing that's for sure: that friendship will strengthen and endure under the leadership of Kevin Rudd. I have found him to

> be a straightforward fellow. Being from Texas, that's what I like. He is thoughtful. He is strategic in thought. And he is committed to the same values that I'm committed to: rule of law, human rights, human decency. And we're so proud you're here.

Bush acknowledged the coming Australian withdrawal from the combat mission in Iraq:

> Obviously, the Prime Minister kept a campaign commitment, which I appreciate. I always like to be in the presence of somebody who does what he says he's going to do. You know, often times politicians go out there and they say one thing on the campaign trail and they don't mean it. Well, this is a guy who meant it.

Rudd would later deeply anger the Bush White House after he allegedly embellished the contents of a presidential phone call to an Australian newspaper editor who was dining at his Sydney residence, Kirribilli House. In the White House's view, his assertion that Bush did not know about the G20 was little more than a dinner-party story designed to big-note himself and deride Bush's intellect.

But for now, it was all smiles. Rudd was so pleased with the meeting that when he walked into the plenary at the NATO summit in Bucharest a few days later, he gave Bush a friendly mock salute, apparently unaware of the television cameras. He was the first Australian prime minister to attend a NATO summit—the fruits of Joel Fitzgibbon's table-thumping—but that wasn't what the news reports focussed on.

Seriously lacking in sleep and having waited all day in the media room at the opulent former palace of the late Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaucescu for something resembling news, we television correspondents were surprised and, yes, a bit delighted when our Channel Seven

cameraman colleague, Dale Fletcher, showed us what he had shot on behalf of the Australian television pool. We would settle for that.

Doffing of any description by an Australian prime minister to an American president does not generally go over terribly well back home. It didn't this time, either.

*

Two weeks after Rudd arrived home from the grand tour, another Australian death in Afghanistan brought the politics back to earth.

On April 28, 27-year-old commando Lance Corporal Jason Marks was shot dead in a gun battle with suspected Taliban fighters about 25 kilometres south of his base at Tarin Kowt. Marks left behind a wife and two young children back home in Sydney. Four other soldiers were wounded in the same incident, and Joel Fitzgibbon flew to Afghanistan to visit them at the Dutch field hospital at the Kamp Holland base.

Back home, the Prime Minister adopted the same tone as his predecessor in warning that the lance corporal's life would likely not be the last lost. 'The Australian nation needs to prepare itself for further losses in the year ahead,' Rudd said.

Opposition leader Brendan Nelson added his voice to the condolences. 'In our uniform, under our flag and in our name, Lance Corporal Jason Marks gave his life for Australia in the cause of freedom against terrorism,' Nelson said, offering his sympathies to the soldier's family and wishing speedy recovery for his wounded colleagues.

> All Australians need to remember that 88 Australians were murdered in Bali in October 2002 by three men who trained in Afghanistan with the Taliban. Our generation is engaged in a struggle against resurgent totalitarianism in the form of Islamic extremism. The kind of world, the kind of Australia that our

children are going to live in will be determined by whether we are able to prevail in Afghanistan.

Nelson's words were heartfelt, his sentiment genuine. But his sometimes-over-earnestness as Opposition leader was not sitting well with his colleagues. Within a few months his popularity ratings would plunge into single digits and, less than a year after taking the helm, Nelson would be ousted in a September challenge by former merchant banker and Australian Republican Movement chairman, Malcolm Turnbull.

But there would be one more funeral before Nelson was forced to step down and another after that before the year was out. Twenty-five-year old Signaller Sean McCarthy would die when a roadside bomb exploded under his patrol vehicle on the afternoon of 8 July. McCarthy had joined the army, aged 18, two months before the September 11 attacks.

And on 27 November, commando Lieutenant Michael Fussell would also succumb to an improvised explosive device which detonated while he was on a foot patrol. He, too, was 25.

'I've said before that there is no higher call for any person than to wear the uniform of Australia,' the Prime Minister said, in tribute. 'And today we are tragically reminded of the risks that come, the terrible risks that come with that calling.'

Two of Fussell's colleagues were wounded. The incident which caused his death was the subject of two inquiries within the ADF. The major in charge of the patrol was subsequently stripped of his command, after they identified problems with training, leadership and discipline.

*

Having promised to end Australia's combat operations in Iraq by mid-year, Kevin Rudd had kept his word. On 2 June 2008, the Australian flag was lowered at the base in Tallil, Iraq, and the combat troops were withdrawn.

In fact, hundreds were left behind to provide embassy security and fill other non-combat jobs.

That day, Foreign Minister Stephen Smith held a news conference in Perth, officially to announce a trip to Europe but also to highlight the withdrawal as a promise kept and laud it, just a little, over the Opposition:

> People should just pause for a moment to remember what the Liberal and National parties said when we made that commitment. They said that the US alliance would be split, that this would be a disaster and I recall the then defence minister, Brendan Nelson, the now Leader of the Opposition, saying this would be a disaster of mammoth proportions. And what you're now seeing is the withdrawal of Australian combat troops from Iraq in an orderly way.

The government wanted to achieve the same, eventually, with Afghanistan. It had determined that this could only be done by stabilising security in the province for which Australia was responsible: focus on our patch of dirt, fix it up and hand it back.

Rudd decided he had to more strictly enforce the general agreement Australia had with its allies that its forces—the Special Forces training the Afghan kandaks within the Fourth Brigade—and the kandaks themselves, should concentrate their activities within Uruzgan province. An imaginary line was traced around the boundaries and although there would be exceptions—such as rebuilding a bridge on Highway One to the south-east in Zabol province—it was designed to keep the troops largely in.

The so-called 'red line' restriction acted as a kind of caveat on Australian operations. Fitzgibbon said it wasn't nearly as bad as those of some other countries: 'Some of them weren't allowed to fight at night.'

The government was focussed on a single objective: training enough of the locals well enough to justify transferring responsibility for security, and

getting out. If the Australian forces and their trainees kept being sent away, they couldn't do that.

Rudd and Fitzgibbon sought assurances from President Karzai that once the local soldiers were trained, they wouldn't be moved elsewhere. It was hard enough keeping them there during the training process. The allied forces contributed funds to make sure the soldiers and police were actually paid. But many came from elsewhere and would go some distance home to visit family and not return to work when they were due. It frustrated the trainers and their commanders a great deal.

There were other pressures in the province. The Dutch commitment had been due to end in 2008 but its government had succeeded in extending it until 2010. The US lobbying would begin well before that to try to get them to stay, and Australia was prevailed upon to also push hard to keep them. The US did the same in pressing Japan for a military commitment, without success.

Ahead of the eventual Dutch withdrawal, the Australian government decided that it was not going to be persuaded to step up and take the lead. It wanted another country—preferably the US—to do that. 'My key focus was to warn Bob Gates every time I saw him that there was no way we would take the lead role in Uruzgan Province,' Fitzgibbon said. 'And that he would have to organise something else.'

Fitzgibbon said he often felt that the US applied pressure military to military and that it could make policy formation difficult. 'I think military processes often deliberately run interference on important policy decisions,' he said. 'It's a mates process … between unequal partners … Of course the Australian ambassador to the US also comes under pressure to make sure the right decisions are made back home.'

Rudd was concerned that taking the lead would require a more-than-doubling of the number of troops and that would seriously strain resources. He also feared that too many adventures over in what were called the 'shoulder' provinces—the real hot-spots of Helmand and Kandahar—would greatly increase the risk of Australian casualties.

Staying within Uruzgan province was, of course, no guarantee of safety. On 2 September 2008, a patrol of SAS soldiers was still within the borders when they were ambushed. Blasted by machine-gun fire and rocket-propelled grenades, they were in diabolical trouble, their vehicles filled with wounded soldiers and the uninjured among them running alongside, dodging bullets. After two exhausting hours exchanging gunfire, the patrol withdrew. Nine soldiers had been wounded and Australian Trooper Mark Donaldson had earned himself a Victoria Cross.

At Rudd's instruction, CDF Angus Houston had ordered Australia's Special Forces also to stay within the boundaries of Uruzgan province and drew an operational ring around Australia's patch of Afghan dirt. Having the red line imposed upon Special Forces as well as the rest of the troops put a new strain on relations between Australia's elite soldiers and the military leadership.

Even at senior levels, the Special Forces thought the notion of staying one side of an imaginary line, even if those they were hunting had high-tailed it to the other side, was ridiculous. They protested in the strongest terms. They argued that the Special Forces soldiers couldn't do what they were there to do—eliminate the threat from insurgents—if they could only chase them so far, and no further.

But their political masters were unmoved, and that also bound their CDF. They were told the exemptions policy, which authorised some activity beyond the borders provided it directly benefited the work inside them, was adequate. Fitzgibbon said he understood the soldiers' argument and knew that occasionally Special Forces in particular ranged beyond the border when necessary. 'I never raised any issue with it,' he said. 'I wasn't prepared to dampen their enthusiasm.'

But the soldiers themselves still wanted the issue addressed. Unable to shift opinion up the hierarchy, some Special Forces soldiers took a highly controversial step. They went around their Australian superiors and began directly lobbying the American commanders to mount the case against the red line from across the Pacific. Towards the end of 2009, Australian

Special Forces officers asked US General Stanley McChrystal to plead their case for political help. McChrystal didn't need much convincing.

Aside from the elite soldiers, he wanted Australian trainers and the Afghans they were training to be available for special operations across the south.

By the beginning of 2010, the US command was planning a pacification operation in what has been dubbed the 'poppy-growing belt' of southern Afghanistan: an area of Helmand south-west of the provincial capital, Lashkar Gar, famous for its opium production.

It was to be a surge-style operation involving 15,000 troops whose objective was to capture the town of Maja using the principles of counter-insurgency and as little violence as possible. Named Operation Moshtarak —which means 'together' in the Dari language of the south-west—it was to be led by Afghan security forces, including both police and Afghan National Army soldiers. American soldiers would make up the next biggest element, followed by the British. The Danes, Canadians and Estonians had also agreed to participate.

McChrystal wanted Afghan troops from Uruzgan in too, along with their Australian trainers. But the red line made that impossible. The operation went ahead, becoming the first under a new transition strategy to capture territory and hand it on to local administrators to run. It was considered a significant step in the move towards transferring security responsibility to the local forces. Australia was not part of it.

The operation brought the issue of the red line to a head. There are differing views as to how big a problem the caveat was. Stephen Smith, then Foreign Minister who became Defence Minister after the 2010 election, said it should not be overstated. 'It was an issue that had to be resolved but it wasn't in my view or my assessment something that got in the way of any of the fundamentals,' Smith said.

Others ascribe it much more significance. Even beyond the Defence Force, some officials described the red line as a 'ring of inflexibility' which put severe strain on the US-Australia relationship, certainly at the military

level. It’s understood to have been raised by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, and by the then US Force commander, Stanley McChrystal.

‘Real things were said,’ one observer insisted. ‘In a polite, courteous American way.’

*

Those in the Australian Defence Force who believed the red line was having side effects, raised their concerns with the government. Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, who in 2011 was the Chief of Army, said it had started to undermine the objective. ‘If you stick very much to provincial lines and you don’t go over those lines and the group next to you sticks to them and they don’t go over the lines, the lines actually become what we call rat lines,’ he said. Rat lines were the paths insurgents used to get between the provinces, untouched. ‘They can be exploited by the bad guys because they know that neither of the other two groups is going to get into a position where they could run into each other.’

After substantial consultations with the US and others, the Defence Minister and his chiefs resolved the tension over the red line in the second quarter of 2010. The rule was applied more flexibly. But by then, the minister wasn’t Joel Fitzgibbon. He had been forced to step down and Senator John Faulkner had taken his place. ‘I looked at this long and hard and the position the Government had when I left the defence portfolio was one that was driven by me,’ Faulkner said.

The backdrop to Fitzgibbon’s departure was a litany of confrontations with the department—and the Defence Force—over which he ultimately presided. It began with the commissioning of the new Defence White Paper in mid-2008 and the serious work was at its peak, just as the global financial crisis struck. Fitzgibbon didn’t win any friends on Russell Hill by calling in senior bureaucrats and military chiefs for an all-day meeting about the White Paper on Father’s Day. But that wasn’t the real issue. When

the time came to finalise the paper's shape, Fitzgibbon was concerned there would not be the money in the Budget to fund what was being recommended.

So was Defence. Senior Defence figures urged their minister to put the whole thing off to avoid compromise and resurrect it when there was less financial pressure on the government. Instead, Fitzgibbon said he wanted to press on, devising a proposal to separate the strategic element of the White Paper from the dollars and cents: to proceed with the strategic vision, but not with the money. It didn't help relations.

The minister also clashed with the Defence leadership after news reports appeared suggesting that the government couldn't send certain aircraft to Afghanistan because they didn't have adequate protection systems. Defence denied ever having provided that advice.

It all wore away at the relationship. But it was a family-related matter which brought Fitzgibbon's demise. It was revealed that his brother, an insurance executive who was seeking a Defence Department contract, had been using his office as a base during negotiations. On the grounds that it was a breach of Rudd's ministerial code of conduct, it cost the minister his job.

Fitzgibbon concedes that by the time he left the portfolio, his relationship with the department was not good. 'I tried very hard for a long time and I knew the risks in going to war with them,' he said. 'But I wasn't going to sit there for three years and not achieve anything.' Even so, Fitzgibbon said he did not feel like Defence had tried to undermine him, personally. 'I think they were just doing things the way they always did them. And I wasn't copping it like others had.'

In the end, he copped it significantly.

15

GOD MOMENTS

AUSTRALIA'S SWING AWAY FROM Liberal–National rule after 11 years had been decisive. But it wasn't of the same magnitude as the seismic shift which occurred when the US swung from the Republicans to Democrats and elected its first African-American president. Barack Obama had been elected on 4 November 2008, and was inaugurated as the 44th president on 20 January 2009.

Looking like a Republican stalking horse from afar, Rudd's predecessor John Howard had attacked Obama as the US election campaign began, not over his Afghan policy but for advocating withdrawing from Iraq. 'If I were running al Qaeda in Iraq, I would put a circle around March 2008 and pray, as many times as possible, for a victory not only for Obama but also for the Democrats,' Howard said on 11 February 2007.

Obama responded that he considered it a compliment to be attacked so soon in his candidacy. He suggested that if Howard was 'ginned up to fight the good fight' in Iraq, he should send 20,000 more Australian troops to do it, 'Otherwise, it's just a bunch of empty rhetoric.'

Twenty-one months later, and three days after Obama was elected, it was a new Australian prime minister who telephoned with congratulations on Australia's behalf. Kevin Rudd had already withdrawn Australian combat troops from Iraq. But there had been reports from inside Obama's campaign that the new President's first priority with Australia would be to ask for more help in Afghanistan.

Although the two had not discussed it in their phone call on 7 November 2008, the Prime Minister put a stake in the ground that same day, against any request. Australia's contribution would not be increased. 'Of the non-

NATO countries contributing to Afghanistan at the moment Australia has the largest contingent, that is a fact,' he said.

Rudd was aware that Obama had promised to refocus military attention on Afghanistan, something he supported. But he was not keen for Australia to be drawn further into the war.

Barely into 2009, another death would underline his concern. On 4 January, 30-year-old Private Gregory Sher, of the 1st Commando Regiment, was killed in a rocket attack in Uruzgan Province. His family described him as a man of purpose with a kind soul.

*

Upon his election, President Obama first took care of the housekeeping. He made his rival, former First Lady Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State, surprising many including Clinton herself. And for continuity's sake—and because he was seen to have done a good job—he had asked the incumbent Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, to stay on.

Obama had then turned his attention to the war. On 27 March 2009, the President unveiled a new strategy for what the White House now routinely called 'Af-Pak'. He had appointed former diplomat Richard Holbrooke as a special envoy to both countries and was dealing with them increasingly as a single issue. (Holbrooke would die suddenly in office in December 2010, from complications following heart surgery.)

The President acknowledged the confusion which had beset the war effort in Afghanistan in recent years:

> Many people in the United States—and many in partner countries that have sacrificed so much—have a simple question: What is our purpose in Afghanistan? After so many years, they ask 'Why do our men and women still fight and die there?' And they deserve a straightforward answer.

He said Afghanistan's future was inextricably linked to its neighbour, Pakistan. America and its allies were not in Afghanistan 'to control that country or to dictate its future' but to 'confront a common enemy'.

> I want the American people to understand that we have a clear and focussed goal: to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan and to prevent their return to either country in the future. That's the goal that must be achieved. That is a cause that could not be more just. And to the terrorists who oppose us, my message is the same: We will defeat you.

Obama's new 'stronger, smarter' strategy followed a review by foreign policy and counter-terrorism specialist Bruce Riedel that he had commissioned upon taking office. Riedel had consulted widely, including with the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan and allies, including Australia. In turn, the Riedel review was followed by three others conducted by Lieutenant General Douglas Lute of the President's National Security Council, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Mike Mullen and General David Petraeus, then commander at CENTCOM.

Obama declared that having already sent 17,000 extra troops to Afghanistan, he would be sending 4000 more and shifting their emphasis to training local security forces—agreed among the allies as a prerequisite for any future withdrawal. It was the precursor to a surge of 33,000 troops he would announce in December—10,000 fewer than then Commander General Stanley McChrystal wanted. In March 2009, Obama also, controversially, nominated the numbers of Afghan soldiers and police for training and named 2011 as a deadline for handing over security. That date alarmed some allies, including Australia, which told him later that they thought it was too soon.

Obama had a message for the Karzai government. His disappointment was becoming increasingly clear and he was blunt.

> Afghanistan has an elected government, but it is undermined by corruption and has difficulty delivering basic services to its people. The economy is undercut by a booming narcotics trade that encourages criminality and funds the insurgency. The people of Afghanistan seek the promise of a better future. Yet once again, we've seen the hope of a new day darkened by violence and uncertainty.

He flagged 'a new compact' with the Afghan government to crack down on corruption, which his envoy, Richard Holbrooke, later said was 'at the highest levels'. The US would also be sending civilians to help round out the military effort: engineers, educators, agriculturalists and lawyers.

Riedel told journalists at a briefing after the President's address that the civilian component was crucial. 'Now, for the first time, we are providing the kind of civilian support that this mission has always needed.

It was a dramatic expansion of the counter-insurgency strategy which some had long complained was seriously lacking, and which others shouted loudly could never work. It was aimed at making the kind of change for which the likes of Australian counter-insurgency expert David Kilcullen had been calling, a change to the 'operational culture' of the conflict. The US and its allies would concentrate more closely on dealing with the cause of instability in the country rather than just its symptoms.

Successful counter-insurgency stabilises a society so insurgents can't succeed, but it depends on having a reliable central government. Kilcullen's version has three pillars: the protection of the population through security; the establishment of strong governance principles and institutions through political support; and the building of a solid economy, through development and humanitarian aid.

Obama promised to set 'clear metrics' to measure progress and to hold his own government and that of Hamid Karzai accountable:

> The world cannot afford the price that will come due if Afghanistan slides back into chaos or al Qaeda operates unchecked. We have a shared responsibility to act—not because we seek to project power for its own sake, but because our own peace and security depends on it.

There was another change in Obama's strategy. Much more than before, it concentrated on Pakistan as being part of both the problem and the solution. There had long been debate about how to deal with Pakistan and the US had acknowledged its importance back in 2001, when then Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage had delivered his 13 September list of demands to the Pakistani ambassador.

But there was always a degree of kid-glove concern about Pakistan. British MP and writer Rory Stewart described the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan as the 'angry kitten and the sleeping tiger'. The kitten, Afghanistan, is inflamed and yowling, while just next door is the tiger: a huge, nuclear-armed state already engaged in volatile regional relationships, not least with India. In the US, as in Britain, Australia and elsewhere, there had long been concern that agitating one might wake the other, with dire consequences.

In his 27 March address, Obama expressed some sympathy for and solidarity with Pakistan. It had suffered at the hands of terrorists too, he reminded Americans. The Opposition People's Party leader and former Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, had been assassinated in a terrorist attack in Rawalpindi just over a year earlier.

Obama urged the US Congress to pass legislation offering US $1.5 billion in aid to Pakistan every year for the following five years to 'build schools and roads and hospitals, and strengthen Pakistan's democracy'. But unlike in the past, he emphasised Pakistan would be made to account for the money.

Immediately after the speech, Richard Holbrooke would describe the difficulty with Pakistan. He told journalists:

> Of all the dilemmas, problems and challenges we face, that's going to be the most daunting, because it's a sovereign country and there is a red line. And the red line is unambiguous and [it has been] stated publicly by the Pakistani government over and over again: No foreign troops on our soil.

But the President had indicated he was equally determined to find the people America was after, whichever side of the border they might be on. 'Pakistan must demonstrate its commitment to rooting out al Qaeda and the violent extremists within its borders,' Obama warned. 'And we will insist that action be taken—one way or another—when we have intelligence about high-level terrorist targets.'

In the briefing by Riedel, Holbrooke and Under Secretary of Defense Michele Flournoy which followed Obama's speech, Holbrooke was asked about what sounded like a veiled presidential threat: 'Does that mean if the Pakistanis will act, we will not, and if they do not, we will?'

'I just don't think we can answer that question,' Holbrooke replied. 'It's speculative, it's hypothetical and it would be deeply injurious to our national interest to speculate.' The answer would come some 17 months later when the US would take matters into its own hands in relation to America's number one target—al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

The new President had made it a campaign promise to find bin Laden, the man ultimately responsible for the 11 September attacks, but who the allied forces had not come close to locating since he escaped during the Battle of Tora Bora in 2002. In August 2010, US intelligence would present the President with the first credible evidence of bin Laden's whereabouts in more than eight years. It would take another nine months, but they would eventually hunt him down.

*

In Australia in mid-2009, Prime Minister Rudd faced a continuity problem. With Joel Fitzgibbon gone from the Defence portfolio, he had to choose a replacement. In a flurry of appointments, he would follow up the Defence move by appointing two former defence ministers as ambassadors abroad: Kim Beazley to Washington and Brendan Nelson—controversially from the other side of politics—to Brussels, the headquarters of NATO. But Rudd had to deal with Fitzgibbon's replacement first. To him, the Special Minister of State, John Faulkner, was the obvious choice. He had represented the portfolio in the Senate, and therefore also in Senate Estimates committees, and was already on the National Security Committee so he was familiar with the challenges.

Defence wanted him too. The only one hesitating was Faulkner himself. 'I think taking me out of that other role was bad for the government,' Faulkner said. 'I bet you Rudd thinks that now.'

Rudd and his deputy, Julia Gillard, both wanted Faulkner to do the job but he thought they should look for someone else. When Labor had won the election, he had taken on a portfolio with a roving brief, responsible for electoral matters and other issues as designated by the leader. It also meant he could act as a kind of Praetorian guard and watch out for issues which might cause the government trouble.

Before the offer came, Faulkner had already decided that he would only stay in politics until the election. He had been in Parliament since 1989, when he filled a vacancy upon the retirement of Arthur Gietzelt, and had been a frontbencher in the Keating government. In Opposition he had enjoyed elder statesman status on the Senate backbench, from where he and fellow former minister Robert Ray turned the forensic examination of bureaucrats into an art form in Senate Estimates hearings. The two men were friends who shared a love of cricket and took regular trips abroad together to watch Test matches. Ray had retired from politics in May 2008. Faulkner's Senate term was up in 2011 and he was planning to do the same.

Then the Prime Minister asked him to serve in Defence. He agreed but told Rudd of his parachute plan and didn't hide his reservations:

> Once you're Defence Minister, it's a twenty-hour-a-day job. And I said to them: 'If I do this, forget politics and every other damn thing. I'll do the job.' But I don't think it was the right thing for the government. I still don't think it was the right thing for the government.

The Defence Force chiefs thought it was very much the right thing.

Faulkner's temperament was more restrained than his predecessor's and not dissimilar to that of the Chief of the Defence Force, Angus Houston. The Defence hierarchy found him a breath of fresh air. A passionate chronicler of history, Faulkner was also an advocate of more openness and transparency in government. He wanted to throw open the windows and let the air in, something Houston said he supported.

'On the whole, I would hope, most politicians and most members of the military accept that the community has the right to know what is being done in their name, done at times at the cost of the lives of their loved ones,' Faulkner would tell an audience of journalists and military and departmental chiefs on 24 February 2010. It was the annual dinner to commemorate the work of World War I correspondent C.E.W. Bean, and I listened with interest. I agreed with Faulkner's argument. Australians had—and have—a right to know what is done in their name. It is the principle upon which this book is built.

*

Like the other ministers before him, Faulkner felt a burden of responsibility in sending young Australians to war, and never more acutely than when one came home in a flag-draped coffin, carried on the shoulders of his mates.

In the midst of Joel Fitzgibbon's struggles with his department, just before he stepped down, two more soldiers returned this way. On the morning of 19 March 2009, Sergeant Brett Till, of the Incident Response Regiment, was killed in Uruzgan's Chambarak Valley, north of Tarin Kowt,

while trying to defuse a bomb. Aged 31, he was the father of two young children. His wife would give birth to their third child later that year.

Sergeant Till's was the second death of an Australian soldier in three days. Twenty-one-year-old Corporal Mathew Hopkins had been killed on March 16 in a firefight with Taliban insurgents while part of a six-man patrol at Kakarak, in Uruzgan province. The town of Kakarak had already seen violence in the Afghan conflict, and not the kind which endeared the locals to the coalition forces.

On 1 July 2002, Kakarak was the scene of a bungled US attack on a local wedding party which killed dozens of civilians. Apparently mistaking traditional celebratory gunfire for insurgent activity, US helicopters and a B-52 bomber blasted the mud-brick compound where 300 wedding guests were gathered.

On 8 July, the US government had launched a joint US–Afghan military investigation. Lieutenant General Gregory Newbold, Director of Operations to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told journalists at the Pentagon that the US went to 'extraordinary lengths to avoid civilian casualties'. He said the Kakarak area had been under surveillance for some time and 'there was sufficient intelligence to believe that there were some what we would call high-value individuals that might be operating in the area'.

Instead, the bombing caused the deaths of civilians. 'We knew they occurred and we regret every one of them,' he said. 'But we do not have hard and fast numbers from what we have seen thus far.' The Afghan government said it did. It alleged that at least 48 people had been killed, with another 117 injured. According to a report in *The Age*, the 18-year-old groom, Abdul Malik, had been visiting another village with his bride and returned to find his parents, four sisters and three brothers all dead.

In a 16 July news conference at Bagram Air Base, in Afghanistan, the Deputy Defense Secretary, Paul Wolfowitz, maintained that there had been 'very little doubt' that insurgents were in the area. He said the US 'always regrets the loss of civilian lives' but had 'no regrets about going after the bad guys'. It was one of the worst US military mistakes of the war to date.

The Americans weren't the only forces facing criticism over civilian casualties. In July 2009, Australia's new defence minister revealed three separate inquiries were underway into incidents involving civilian casualties. On 5 July, the SBS *Dateline* program broadcast allegations about alleged Australian involvement in the deaths of local civilians in Uruzgan province. One of three people representing Uruzgan in the national Parliament, Hajii Abdul Khaliq, blamed Australian troops for the death and wounding of members of his family several years earlier. 'The Australian troops don't have a good reputation in Afghanistan. People hate the Australian troops,' Khaliq told *Dateline.*

Minister John Faulkner said the government took the issue 'very seriously indeed'. Another inquiry into an incident in January of that year found 'insufficient evidence' to blame Australians for civilian deaths, but that the protocols governing who could fire artillery were not adequate.

Less than two weeks after the *Dateline* allegations, there was another incident involving civilians and the first Australian death on Faulkner's watch. Private Benjamin Ranaudo, from the First Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, was killed by a land-mine in the Baluchi Valley, near Tarin Kowt. Four others were wounded: one Australian soldier and three civilians, including an eight-year-old boy. Ranaudo was 22 and had been in Afghanistan just two months. Joel Fitzgibbon, had farewelled him among the 600-strong Second Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force on 15 May in one of his final public duties as minister.

Upon taking over after Fitzgibbon's 4 June 2009 resignation, Faulkner decided he needed to do more than just worry about the safety of the troops. He instigated a force protection review. 'The personal safety of our troops is something about which one can never cut corners,' Faulkner said.

He acknowledged the Howard government had spent a lot on defence. But on Afghanistan in particular, he felt the hard information was missing.

Faulkner ordered the review in July 2009. Eleven months later, it made 48 recommendations. With the migration of some bomb-making techniques from the Iraq conflict and changes in the use of technology, the kinds of

threats soldiers in Afghanistan were facing had changed. Over the previous few years, insurgents had started using mobile phones to trigger improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Among the changes were improvements to living quarters, an upgrade of medical support and a new protection system to provide advance warning of rocket attacks. A separate new system would track projectiles in flight and warn of any incoming danger from indirect fire. Recalling my own fearful nights in Kandahar, I thought that if we weren't about to pull out of Afghanistan any time soon, then any kind of early warning system sounded like money well spent.

Body armour was improved and protection and firepower on vehicles beefed up. There were new kits to help with route clearance using rollers to lessen the risk to troops in vehicles, and funding to train more bomb detection dogs. And there were health measures: hearing protection, a buddy system to ease mental stress, and a 'decompression program' to help with the transition back to home life.

In all, the changes cost just over $1 billion, and were to be implemented over four years. They went a long way to improving conditions for the soldiers, although nothing would ever guarantee life. Some of the IED measures had already been implemented by the time of the announcement and others were in the pipeline.

Six days after the new measures were unveiled, the ADF suffered its first double fatality of the war, and the first for Australia since Vietnam. Two young bomb detection specialists, 21-year-old Sapper Jacob Moerland and 26-year-old Sapper Darren Smith, both of the Second Combat Engineers Regiment, were killed in a roadside blast on 7 June 2010, along with Smith's bomb detection dog, Herbie. Moerland died instantly and Smith succumbed later to his wounds. Each man was awarded his service medals posthumously, pinned to cushions on the pair of coffins which were carried off a C-130 at Amberley Air Base near Brisbane.

Their deaths were given added public poignancy by the fact that ABC television journalist Chris Masters was embedded with their unit when they

were killed. Masters had been filming a program for *Four Corners*, which aired in July 2010. In the two-part documentary, *A Careful War*, viewers saw and heard from Moerland and Smith in the days leading up to their deaths. As Masters said, it drove home just how dangerous was the work Australian soldiers were doing.

Herbie was cremated in Afghanistan and his ashes returned to Australia. In June 2010, a memorial service was held in the South Australian town of Goolwa, where there is a war dog shrine. Hundreds of dogs were brought by their owners to pay their respects to Herbie, who was the fifth Australian bomb detection dog to die in the Afghanistan War. Herbie's death alongside his handler and his mate brought the role of the bomb dogs to greater public attention. Another Australian bomb sniffing dog, Sarbi, was more fortunate, earning fame when she was found in an Afghan village on 28 October 2009 having been missing for more than a year. Sarbi had disappeared during the huge firefight with insurgents in which Trooper Mark Donaldson earned his Victoria Cross the year before. Apparently stolen, she was found at random, repatriated and retired.

*

The change in the Afghanistan mission under the Labor government also prompted a renewal of the actuarial analysis performed ahead of every military deployment which determines the likely number of casualties based on all available information about risk.

Whenever conditions changed, the mathematical equation was done again and a new number was produced for Defence's political masters, so they knew the possible toll of any commitment they were about to make. It was never made public for fear it might make war seem like a numbers game.

The numbers are, literally, a matter of life and death. Repeatedly since 2001, officials and military chiefs alike have held their breaths over them, hoping the real count falls well short of the projected one. So far, over the

past almost-decade in Afghanistan—with the three-year gap in the Australian combat role—it has. At every level there has been great relief that this remains the case.

Some of the troops have described ‘God moments’—times when, by rights, they or their colleagues should have been killed or injured. This has happened over and over, sometimes seeming like little more than good luck was protecting them.

Two former SAS soldiers who fought in Afghanistan are divided over whether good luck, good training or both have spared Australia a higher body count. ‘I think a lot of guys get into the SAS because they are lucky,’ one soldier who served in the first deployment in 2001–02 told me. ‘They’re just naturally lucky people … Some of the things that I’ve done—I look back and go “Oooh, that was lucky”.’

But his colleague had a different view:

> Even though you say ‘Yeah, we’re all lucky’, it definitely goes back to—this guy has common sense, self-discipline, good training, all those things. [He] can work as a team. All those things come together. You sort of overlook those things and say, ‘Phew, that was lucky’. You’ve got to go back to say, ‘Why am I so lucky?’

The second soldier said he believed it was good judgment and a set of almost-instinctively refined skills which could cause an SAS soldier to choose to park his vehicle in one place over another, a decision which could be the difference between survival and the alternative. These soldiers recall—but don’t like to detail—split-second good decisions and seemingly miraculous escapes which have made that difference. Sometimes, of course, no amount of skill, judgment or good equipment can prevent the loss of life.

By mid–June 2010, there had been 13 Australian soldiers killed in Afghanistan, 12 in the previous three years. That, and the sheer duration of the conflict, was threatening to start turning Australians against the war.

After Australian forces were returned to Afghanistan under the Howard government, the Lowy Institute began charting public opinion. In 2007, it showed Australians were 50-50 on being involved. By 2008, 56 per cent were opposed. In 2009, that was back to 51 per cent. In 2010, it would rise again to 54 per cent and in 2011 to 59 per cent. On 20–22 March 2009, Newspoll conducted a telephone poll of voters on whether, if the US asked, Australia should send more troops to Afghanistan. sixty-five per cent said no.

When he sent troops back to Afghanistan, John Howard had been mindful of the likely march of public opinion:

> A long protracted involvement in a limited war loses, over time, public support because there's no incentive for public support. You're beginning to take casualties, there's no end to it. It's not a major conflict, therefore … people don't feel the security of the nation is at stake the way they did in World War I or World War II. And there's always debate about the worthiness of those in charge of the country in which we're fighting.

*

In 2009, the Afghan people re-elected President Hamid Karzai. The election was widely discredited as having been heavily corrupted.

Even before then, the United States had begun to have serious doubts about Karzai. By the middle of that year, it was rapidly losing faith in the man it had helped into the job, and had begun to deride him as 'often agitated' and harbouring 'anti-US conspiracy theories'.

The election was scheduled for 20 August, and the US had a considerable interest in the outcome. By mid-2009, US ambassador to Afghanistan, Karl Eikenberry, had begun holding weekly meetings with Karzai. In the second week of July, he met the President four times. 'The meetings were cordial but raised certain concerns for me about the status of

the US–Afghan relationship, both in the lead up to the election and over the long-term, should Karzai win re-election,' Eikenberry wrote to Washington after the meeting.

Cables published by Wikileaks show Karzai had developed the view that the US was trying to encourage other candidates for the presidency, and was deliberately promoting his chief opponent, Abdullah Abdullah. Karzai told Eikenberry he suspected the US and Iran were working together to undermine him.

The Americans' character assessment was a far cry from the glowing praise of the early days of 2002. Eikenberry thought him a man with two distinct personalities:

> The first is of a paranoid and weak individual unfamiliar with the basics of nation-building and overly self-conscious that his time in the spotlight of glowing reviews from the international community had passed. The other is that of an ever-shrewd politician who sees himself as a nationalist hero who can save the country from being divided by the decentralisation agenda of Abdullah, other political rivals, neighbouring countries and the US.

He also reflected on Karzai's mental state. 'If re-elected, it is my hope that a Karzai who no longer needs to run for re-election will be better positioned and in a healthier frame of mind to pursue this agenda, as well as meaningful national reconciliation,' Eikenberry wrote.

After these four meetings, and another the following week, Eikenberry lamented that Karzai kept telling foreign visitors that the US was in his country not to serve Afghanistan's interests but its own. The Afghan President had told him he wanted to recover 'the spirit of 2002–04' when relations were better:

> He would like for US forces to again be able to drive their humvees through villages, greeted warmly by villagers who would shout ‘Good morning, Sergeant …’ I told him Americans do not long for a day in which their soldiers are hailed throughout Afghanistan; they are instead growing impatient for the day a respected Afghan army and national police force are fully capable of providing security to the Afghan populace. Time is not unlimited.

Eikenberry believed Karzai was captive to a range of ‘paranoias’, including the idea that the US was trying to divide Pashtuns on either side of the Afghan–Pakistan border, was only interested in a short-term strategy and would disengage within two years. Eikenberry described these as ‘misperceptions of US policy and intentions’.

After endorsing the new surge strategy, the Obama administration would announce that a drawdown of US troops would begin in mid-2011, exactly two years after Karzai’s ‘paranoid’ allegations.

*

On Remembrance Day, 2009, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd went to Afghanistan to see the troops. He did not go to Kabul, but telephoned President Karzai from the Australian base at Tarin Kowt.

Australia’s ambassador, Martin Quinn, later reported details of the conversation back to his US counterpart in Kabul in his final call on Eikenberry before returning to Canberra.

US embassy official Joseph Mussomeli duly summarised Quinn’s views in a cable back to the State Department. Quinn’s portrait of Karzai supported the US’ existing view. He said Rudd had ‘delivered a tough message’ to Karzai after the President had given a US radio interview suggesting again that the western allies were not concerned for his country.

He said Karzai had ranted against the US President in a ‘rambling and incoherent’ response to Rudd’s criticisms.

In his farewell chat, Ambassador Quinn took the opportunity to assure the Americans that ‘Australia is in Afghanistan for the long haul’. But he also said he was concerned that attitudes towards the war had swung from ‘too optimistic to too pessimistic’. He noted that the same could not necessarily be said for the Australians’ partners in Uruzgan, the Dutch. Quinn reportedly confided that the Australians were ‘complying with requests that they keep pressure on the Dutch to keep a battle group in Uruzgan’, but noted that the government in The Hague was ‘under tremendous pressure’, both from within its own coalition and from the public to withdraw their troops.

The Dutch were planning to pull out in August 2010, and Dutch soldiers were openly pressing their political masters to be allowed to stay. They coached Afghan officials to tell visiting Dutch ministers how much they needed the Netherlands forces. ‘Uruzgan Governor Hamdam and the Chora District Chief, Mohammad Daudhad, had been word perfect in their messaging to the minister,’ the US assessed after the Dutch Defence Minister, Eimert Van Middelkoop, had visited. They had told him that Afghans wanted the Dutch to stay and that ‘the Dutch are achieving more than other coalition partners’. The Americans described their attitude as boastful, something the Australians privately also complained about.

Rudd had been trying to stop other countries—and the Australian public—from wavering. ‘Let’s be honest about this: this is a difficult, hard, and bloody war,’ he said on a visit to New York in September 2009. ‘No one should pretend that it’s not. And it’s going to get harder. But that should not weaken our resolve or dim our vision as to why we are there in the first place.’

One of Rudd’s most senior diplomats adopted the no-pretending approach when the subject of Afghanistan came up over a dinner in London on 9 January 2010 to farewell the Chinese ambassador, Fu Ying, formerly ambassador in Canberra. The Australian high commissioner, John Dauth,

let fly his views on Afghanistan and particularly the upcoming London conference of countries participating in the International Security Assistance Force.

Morale about progress in Afghanistan had plunged in the wake of the 2009 election. After a non-decisive first-round result and widespread reports of ballot stuffing, intimidation, poor security and low voter turnout, a run-off ballot had been scheduled between the incumbent president, Karzai, and his main challenger, Abdullah Abdullah. But when Abdullah's demands for changes within the electoral commission were not met, he pulled out. Karzai was declared the winner, with his legitimacy significantly undermined.

With a dependable central government crucial to the success of the allies' counter-insurgency strategy, some were despairing about the likelihood of success and any timetable for withdrawal. John Dauth was among them. US diplomats at the dinner reported to Washington that Dauth had said he thought the London conference would be a 'waste of time' and that there were 'too many conferences on Afghanistan'.

'He hoped that the international community would "get out of Afghanistan",' US ambassador Louis Susman reported. Ambassador Fu agreed that 'nothing would happen' at the London meeting. But the French ambassador, Maurice Gourdault-Montagne, and their Indian counterpart, high commissioner Nalin Surie both disagreed with Dauth's assessment.

Surie said he thought the conference was very important and that his foreign minister would be attending. But he perceived there was division between the US and Britain, later explaining to his alarmed American colleague that his concern was based on Britain's criticism of President Obama's July 2011 timetable. Susman assured him privately that there was no division. And Gourdault-Montagne grumbled about a lack of consultation on a separate British-hosted meeting on Yemen to be held at the same time. It wasn't the picture of unity over dinner.

The Americans weren't clear on whether Dauth was expressing a personal view or speaking on behalf of his government. At home, the

government was still saying Australia would be staying the course.

It wasn't enough to convince the Dutch Parliament. Led by strident opponents of the deployment in the Labour Party within the government coalition, a majority of the Parliament wanted out. After a 16-hour crisis, the three-way coalition which formed the Dutch government collapsed in the early hours of Saturday, 20 February 2010. 'I unfortunately note that there is no longer a fruitful path for the Christian Democrats, Labour Party and Christian Union to go forward,' Christian Democrats leader and Prime Minister, Jan Pieter Balkenende, told journalists.

The Australian government wasn't surprised. It wasn't prepared to nominate a new leading partner for Uruzgan. And it wasn't prepared to take over, either. 'It's a matter for NATO to have that conversation with us,' Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said. 'We're not going to identify a particular country or countries. We've made it clear it can't be us. We believe it's appropriate that it's a senior NATO country.'

When the Dutch eventually withdrew in December 2010, they had suffered 25 military deaths in Afghanistan: 19 in combat, four in accidents, one by suicide and one from illness.

As of mid 2011, the US had suffered the highest number of fatalities of the Afghan War—almost 1500; the British had suffered almost 400; and the Canadians more than 150. And despite Rudd's criticisms of France and Germany as doing little serious work, by mid-2011 each had registered more than twice as many deaths as Australia.

In mid-2010, Rudd's complaints about the French, the Germans, the Dutch and even about Karzai would shortly take a back seat to much more personal concerns.

16

TURNING POINT

IF THE LAST TWO decades have taught Australian journalists anything, it should be how to tell when a political leader is in serious trouble. But we are slow learners.

Within 18 months of an election, there are two points in the year when a struggling leader is most at risk of a challenge: around mid-year, and in December or January. In 1990, Paul Keating took down Bob Hawke in December. In 1995, Howard replaced Alexander Downer on Australia Day. In 2002, it was mid-June when Kim Beazley challenged Simon Crean and lost. In 2003, it was early December when Mark Latham surfed in on a Beazley challenge and took over from Crean. Beazley returned in January 2005, when Latham's leadership collapsed. Just under two years later, on 4 December 2006, Beazley was bounced in favour of Rudd. In 2008, Brendan Nelson's leadership was destined to last only a year. The successful challenge by Malcolm Turnbull broke with tradition and took place in September. But in wresting the leadership from Turnbull in 2009, Tony Abbott resumed the pattern. The ballot was on 1 December.

So, when Kevin Rudd was struggling in June 2010, in what was expected to be the final fortnight of Parliament before an election, we should have seen it coming. But while some of us theorised about the possibility of a coup, there was little genuine public speculation until it was upon us. And Rudd didn't pick it, either.

It was Midwinter Ball time again and with his wife, Therese Rein, interstate the Prime Minister arrived with his daughter, Jessica. There wasn't the usual swarm of colleagues and hangers-on in his near orbit but his semi-solitude was only in the passing-strange category until it was time for the traditional leaders' speeches. Opposition leader Tony Abbott's

offering was read with hesitations, a few self-deprecating jokes and nothing too serious.

But Rudd's speech was a long, strange non sequitur of digs at various people. He took a swing at his own staff, by effectively endorsing criticisms that they were too young. He let the mining industry know the government had 'long memories' over its extremely troublesome campaign against his proposed mining tax, when some of its representatives were sitting at a table just below the stage. And he finished off on the Chinese government, trying to reclaim and recast an anecdote which *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist David Marr had told about him in a *Quarterly Essay* profile. Marr asserted that during a private briefing for journalists at the Copenhagen summit on climate change the previous December, Rudd had attacked the Chinese delegation's position and described it using colourful references to rodents and copulation. The Prime Minister had effectively staked his climate credentials on a global deal at Copenhagen which ultimately didn't happen. Marr had given a second-hand version of his reaction as negotiations deteriorated. Having not been present at the now-famous briefing, the *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist was therefore free of the confidentiality obligations which bound those of us who were. His version had received a lot of attention.

At the Midwinter Ball, Rudd tried to make a joke out of the story by telling a fractured, fairy-tale version of what happened. But in so doing, he seemed to confirm he'd said something close to what Marr alleged. Adding injury to insult, the Chinese Vice Premier, whose world's-most-populous country was being publicly insulted at prime ministerial level, was arriving in Australia a few days later. It was all very strange.

Following the ball, Rudd went into the final parliamentary sitting week before the 2010 winter break in extremely bad shape. The Copenhagen issue reached beyond simple tales of undiplomatic, fruity language. Climate change had already proven itself to be a lethal subject. The Howard government's rather belated acceptance of the need for action—in response to public pressure in the midst of a drought—had contributed to its demise.

And just weeks before Copenhagen, when Rudd thought he had secured a deal with the Opposition to pass controversial legislation introducing an emissions trading scheme (ETS), it had claimed its next victim.

A former environment minister, the then Opposition leader Malcolm Turnbull was a supporter of emissions trading. But others in the Coalition were not. Sensing a shift in public opinion and in no doubt of the high degree of angst in Opposition ranks over Turnbull's planned cooperation with the government, frontbencher Tony Abbott led a revolt.

On Thursday, 26 November 2009, on the eve of the vote and after Turnbull had pushed the deal through a meeting of the joint Liberal–National parties, Tony Abbott and several others resigned their shadow ministry positions. Abbott warned Turnbull that unless he abandoned his plan, he would face a leadership spill on the coming Monday. 'I would like Malcolm to come to his senses,' Abbott said. 'The last thing we want in the party room at the moment is to have another leader's blood on our hands, so to speak. But the most important thing of all is to get this policy changed.' Turnbull was unbowed. On Monday, 1 December 2009, he faced the threatened challenge. Abbott won by a single vote.

When the collapse of the domestic political deal—and Turnbull's leadership—was followed swiftly by the failure to reach the hoped-for global emissions deal in Denmark, Rudd lost his environmental nerve. He shelved plans to tackle what he had called 'the greatest moral challenge of our time' until some other time better suited to moral challenges.

By mid-2010, the pressure on his own leadership had reached crisis point. Polls showed many Australians who had voted for him in 2007 believing he would address climate change were disillusioned. While there had been rumours that the unrest in the ranks was getting serious and Rudd had become concerned, those plotting against him quelled it enough to produce a false sense of security.

Unbeknown to Rudd, key members of the Labor Right faction were pressing his deputy, Julia Gillard, to move against him. They believed he was not taking advice (although it would emerge eventually that Gillard had

been one of those urging him to set his ETS aside) and that his slumping popularity made him an electoral liability. He had also refused to defer to factional considerations when appointing his ministry. These things, along with his reputation for pushing people hard and taking too long to make decisions, would be cited privately as reasons he had to go.

*

With public opinion also shifting against the war in Afghanistan, events there in the days before what would become a leadership showdown brought no relief.

On Monday, 21 June, three more Australian commandos joined the honour roll. Private Benjamin Chuck and Private Scott Palmer, both 27, and Private Timothy Aplin, 38, were killed and seven colleagues were injured when their helicopter crashed in northern Kandahar.

The incident, announced the following day, cast a pall over the Parliament. ‘These are hard days, very hard days,’ Rudd told the House. ‘Fundamental national interests are at stake, national interests which go to the security of us all, and the security of our friends and allies. We therefore will stay the course and complete the mission.’

In the Senate, John Faulkner also honoured the three men’s service. ‘All commandos take the rank of private,’ he said. ‘They are equals. They are comrades. They are mates. Our fallen soldiers and their families have paid a very, very high—an unthinkably high—price for that dedication. We will never forget, although we can never repay, that debt.’

Faulkner was acutely aware of his own role in determining the fate of those young men and their deaths affected him deeply. ‘Did I feel it? Yes, I did. I felt a really heavy responsibility in that regard,’ he said. ‘I’m the one allowing the use of helicopters outside Uruzgan so when helicopters go down outside Uruzgan, if I hadn’t made that decision the crash might not have happened. Think about that.’

Within 24 hours domestic politics swamped reportage of the incident. Exactly one week, almost to the hour, after his strange ball speech, Rudd's prime ministership was destroyed. That morning, a newspaper report had suggested Rudd had become concerned there might be moves against him but, instead of talking to people himself, he dispatched his chief of staff, Alister Jordan, to ring around testing support. Some Labor figures saw that as confirmation he was out of touch.

Pressed by leaders of the Right faction, his deputy, Julia Gillard, went to his office and told him she would mount a challenge the following morning. Word of a possible challenge broke on the ABC's 7 pm television news bulletin. I suggested to two younger colleagues in our bureau that they might like to stick around. We may not always see a looming challenge before it comes, but we know when it's arrived and it was clear this one had, despite some oblivious senior Labor figures insisting nothing was happening. There would be much racing up and down the corridors that night. We worked until 1 am.

Rudd had few allies left, but John Faulkner was one. A loyal Labor man, Faulkner was with Rudd through the meetings which followed Gillard's night-time confrontation. He walked with him to his fate in the morning and back again to his office, acting as foil for the dazed, dumped Prime Minister who would otherwise have had to run the gauntlet of the television cameras alone.

In the prime-ministerial courtyard, Rudd made a long, sad statement. The presence of his wife, Therese, and his children sustained him as he tearfully listed 28 achievements of which he was proud. 'What I'm less proud of is the fact that I have now blubbered,' he said, breaking the tension by raising a laugh. It was a tragic scene. Here was a very smart man who had brought himself undone by becoming isolated from any kind of support base. I wasn't alone in thinking that if he had just been a bit nicer to the people around him—colleagues, bureaucrats and even his own staff—it might never have come to this.

*

Suddenly, Australia had a new Prime Minister. Like him or not, voters had gone to bed on the Wednesday night being led by the bloke they had chosen, but on Thursday morning, it would be someone else entirely. The first female Prime Minister—soon sworn in by Australia's first female Governor-General, Quentin Bryce—had not yet earned the support of the nation. At her first news conference in her new position, Gillard spoke of her background, her hopes for the country and her credentials for government.

By way of explanation for the stunning events of the previous 24 hours, she said simply that a 'good government' had lost its way. She promised fairness, strength and responsibility and paid tribute to Labor leaders past, including Kevin Rudd—and even a couple of Liberals—declaring a re-elected Labor government would have the Budget back in surplus by 2013.

Credited with few security credentials despite having been a member of the National Security Committee for two and a half years, the new Prime Minister also mentioned the war.

> I want to say to our troops, men and women at home and abroad —we are a grateful country and we acknowledge your sacrifice. Our country relies on you to keep us safe. To keep the peace and to honour the US and the other alliances that are so important for our nation.

*

In the US, they were wrestling with an episode of dishonour. The commander of US forces in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, had been the subject of a profile in the 22 June 2010 edition of *Rolling Stone* magazine. But the comments he and his aides had allowed to be recorded

were breathtakingly frank and highly disparaging of senior members of the Obama administration.

McChrystal had been appointed the US and NATO commander in Afghanistan almost exactly a year earlier after Obama had fired the incumbent, General David McKiernan, on advice from both the Pentagon and the joint military chiefs.

With the change of commander, Defense Secretary Robert Gates had ordered yet another review of the situation in Afghanistan, which McChrystal conducted upon his arrival in June 2009. It recommended sending another 40,000 troops. The White House interpreted the recommendation as trying to force the President to step up the war. It put Obama and McChrystal immediately at odds. After much back and forth and great tension between the White House and the Pentagon, Obama would eventually endorse a surge of 30,000 troops. But McChrystal wouldn't be there to oversee it.

McChrystal had previously received a dressing down after giving a speech in which he criticised a proposal for Afghanistan whose chief proponent was Vice President Joe Biden. It involved reducing to a small presence inside the country with any ensuing trouble to be managed from outside, including through strikes from unmanned drone aircraft.

But the sneering tone of the *Rolling Stone* piece was too much for Obama. In it, a McChrystal aide referred to Biden as 'Bite-Me' and McChrystal himself had said: 'Biden? Who's that?' Aides were also quoted calling National Security Adviser Jim Jones a 'clown' and Special Envoy Richard Holbrooke 'a wounded animal'.

By 23 June, McChrystal was in Washington tendering his resignation. The President accepted it. 'I did so with considerable regret, but also with certainty that it is the right thing for our mission in Afghanistan, for our military, and for our country,' Obama said, standing in the Rose Garden flanked by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Mike Mullen, Vice President Biden, Secretary Robert Gates and the man who would replace McChrystal, the then head of Central Command, General David Petraeus.

‘I don’t make this decision based on any difference in policy with General McChrystal, as we are in full agreement about our strategy,’ Obama continued. ‘Nor do I make this decision out of any sense of personal insult.’ Nevertheless, there was no doubting that the insulting comments were at the heart of events. Obama said he welcomed debate within his team but would not tolerate division.

> The conduct represented in the recently published article does not meet the standard that should be set by a commanding general. It undermines the civilian control of the military that is at the core of our democratic system. And it erodes the trust that’s necessary for our team to work together to achieve our objectives in Afghanistan.

The White House displeasure reverberated around the world. Obama telephoned Afghan President Hamid Karzai to notify him of McChrystal’s resignation. He also phoned British Prime Minister David Cameron. British Lieutenant General Nick Parker was appointed as interim ISAF leader until Petraeus’ commission was confirmed.

It was a big couple of days for personnel changes. Within 24 hours of the McChrystal bombshell, the US was also grappling with the fact that its ally Australia had a new prime minister. The dramatic overthrow would leave American officials puzzling over the vagaries of the Australian political system.

After Julia Gillard was sworn in, Obama called to congratulate her. The White House press secretary, Robert Gibbs, issued a briefing note on the presidential phone call, carefully worded to acknowledge Gillard’s ‘assumption’ of the position of Prime Minister:

> The President praised the special alliance between the United States and Australia and the shared interests, values, and bonds that underpin it. He and Prime Minister Gillard underscored their

> shared commitment to closely work together on the broad range of global challenges confronting both countries, including in Afghanistan.

Earlier, the White House had issued a statement also indicating the President wished ‘to extend his thanks and best wishes to former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, who remains a great friend of America’.

For her part, Gillard described her conversation with the US President as a ‘great honour and privilege’. ‘I assured President Obama that my approach to Afghanistan will continue the approach taken to date by the Australian government,’ she told members of the press gallery in the prime-ministerial courtyard on the drizzly morning of 25 June, her first full day as Prime Minister. ‘I fully support that deployment and I indicated to President Obama that he should expect to see the Australian efforts in Afghanistan continuing.’

The next day, a Saturday, Gillard received her first prime-ministerial briefing on the Afghan and other deployments from Chief of the Defence Force Angus Houston, and Defence Minister, John Faulkner.

As well as an exercise in informing herself, she also used it as a picture opportunity. There was an election coming—a fact she had acknowledged at her news conference two days earlier—and she needed to be seen to be getting across security policy. Within some security agencies, there was ground to be made up in that regard.

There had been some talking behind hands about the way security policy had been managed under the Rudd government. Some felt that Rudd—and his deputy, Gillard—had afforded National Security Committee meetings a lesser priority than the previous prime minister, John Howard, and under Gillard there was still some uncertainty about how things would go. Some in senior ranks of the Defence Force were privately critical of Gillard’s credentials. They feared she was not a strategic thinker and might be too easily persuaded to an American point of view—although robust

disagreement had not been a particular hallmark of the alliance relationship under either of her immediate predecessors.

Gillard's reaction to receiving the congratulatory phone call from President Obama didn't dispel that view. When US ambassador Jeffrey Bleich called on her after the President's phone call, she marvelled at having had 'the opportunity' to speak to the President. 'And given my fascination with American politics, [it was] a fantastic opportunity,' Gillard told Bleich. Her excited laugh made some onlookers wince.

*

The new Prime Minister also wanted to assure Australian forces of her support and commitment. A week after taking over, she would do that in the way expected of prime ministers since John Howard set a precedent in 2002—by attending the funerals of the three soldiers who had died just before she had taken office. It is a practice which only continues because the casualties remain relatively low. If the numbers were to jump into the hundreds or thousands, it likely wouldn't happen.

One week after she took over, Gillard stood on the shores of Queensland's Lake Tinaroo alongside Opposition counterpart, Tony Abbott and Defence Minister John Faulkner and contemplated Private Benjamin Chuck's flag-draped coffin, as the bugler played the Last Post and the piper, Amazing Grace. There were already two more funerals coming up, and there would be others.

A week later, at a Brisbane ceremony to farewell Private Timothy Aplin, they joined the Defence leadership in offering condolences to his wife and four children, aged fifteen, twelve, nine and eight.

And at Christ Church Anglican in Darwin, on 11 July, the third soldier, rugby union player Private Scott Palmer, from Katherine, was also laid to rest. As Private Palmer's funeral proceeded, more bad news came. Private Nathan Bewes, 23, had been killed by a roadside bomb in the Chora Valley, in Uruzgan province, just before midnight on 9 July. They would all gather

again two weeks later in Murwillumbah, northern New South Wales, to add his name to those the Afghan conflict had claimed.

After this string of melancholy duties, Faulkner told Gillard that he had not changed his mind about the plan laid out when Rudd had asked him to take on Defence. He still wanted to quit. She persuaded him to stay on in the Senate but agreed that he would step down from the ministry at the coming election. It would require a ministerial reshuffle if the Labor government was returned. Rudd had made it clear he wanted the foreign affairs portfolio, leaving Stephen Smith needing another job.

If she won the election, she would have some rearranging to do.

*

As usual, the US embassy had been watching events up on Capital Hill, a few hundred metres from its door, with considerable interest.

In the two years since Rudd had won office, the US had been sometimes critical of his handling of sensitive matters. Rudd's sudden 2008 announcement of a non-proliferation push while visiting Hiroshima, Japan, greatly displeased the Americans. As Richard Armitage recalled: 'We were very unamused by that because he forgot to ... tell the Americans who actually have some equities there … I won't play on your patch without your permission. Don't play on ours.' Cables published by the Wikileaks website show that in March 2009, its embassy in Canberra had described as 'puzzling, if not inept' Rudd's decision not to tell the Australian media he was hosting Chinese Communist Party propaganda chief, Li Changcum, at his Canberra residence, The Lodge, when Chinese state-owned media were invited. 'Less than 24 hours later, Rudd declared he would push for China to be given a greater role at the IMF when he attends the G20 summit next week,' the embassy reported to Washington on 24 March.

Australia had been pressing to make the Group of 20 biggest economies, rather than the G8, the pre-eminent decision-making body in response to the global financial crisis, and the April 2009 meeting was to be Rudd's first,

followed by a second meeting in Pittsburgh, in the US, in September. But his handling of the Chinese meeting raised some US doubts about his mode of operation. The Americans noted that it could fuel arguments that he is ‘too deferential to China’.

The Americans’ view of Gillard had been positive from the time she took the deputy leadership, although they noted her ‘socialist’ background. The US embassy identified her as a rising star in 2008 and detected a change in her attitude to the alliance, from a lack of obvious interest before becoming deputy Labor leader to an active engagement afterwards.

‘Although warm and engaging in her dealings with American diplomats, it’s unclear whether this change in attitude reflects a mellowing of her views or an understanding of what she needs to do to become leader of the ALP,’ ambassador Robert McCallum reported back to then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in 2008. ‘It is likely a combination of the two.’ He also noted that although she was from the Labor Party’s ‘soft Left’ faction, she had close ties to members of the Right.

New South Wales Labor powerbroker Mark Arbib and Australian Workers Union Secretary, Paul Howes, had separately spoken in support of Gillard to embassy officials. Arbib described her as ‘one of the most pragmatic politicians in the ALP’ and Howes assured them ‘she votes with the Right’. Both were later involved in her elevation.

Under the headline ‘Sorry, no Lefty ALP leaders’, McCallum commented on the likelihood of Gillard eventually taking over, describing her as Rudd’s ‘heir apparent’, but noting that Coalition MPs believed her unmarried status and ‘childlessness’ would work against her. ‘Conventional wisdom is that Rudd will be Prime Minister for eight or nine years and then hand over the leadership 12–18 months out from an election,’ McCallum wrote.

Julia Gillard arrived a little sooner than he predicted and didn’t wait long to take Australia to the polls. On 15 July, she addressed the National Press Club and unveiled what would be her election slogan: ‘moving forward’. Two days later, she convened a news conference in the prime-ministerial

courtyard outside her office at Parliament House. ‘Good afternoon Australians one and all,’ Gillard began. ‘Can I say good afternoon to members of the Canberra Press Gallery and at least say to them they’ll be relieved to know their days of standing on street corners waiting for the election to be called are over.’

After the frenzy of the previous three weeks, it was hardly much relief. The madness was really just beginning.

*

It was a cheap and nasty election campaign with both Labor and the Coalition treating voters like mugs. Because the war in Afghanistan continued to have bipartisan support, it only featured in the five-week slanging match through events beyond both sides’ control.

On 25 July 2010, Wikileaks, run by Australian Julian Assange, unveiled hundreds of thousands of leaked operational reports from Afghanistan, detailing the activities of all allied countries’ forces, including the Australians.

And just over a week before election day, there were more deaths. SAS Trooper Jason Brown, aged 29, was shot and killed by insurgents in an ambush in northern Kandahar on 13 August. His patrol had received one of Faulkner’s exemptions to move beyond Uruzgan’s boundary.

Then, on 20 August, on the eve of the election, there was another double fatality. A roadside bomb killed two members of the Sixth Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, and wounded two others. Private Tomas Dale, 21, and Private Grant Kirby, 35, had left their Bushmaster vehicle during a patrol in Uruzgan’s Baluchi Valley when the device exploded. Their deaths put the election in greater perspective.

When the poll result came on the night of 21 August, it was no result at all. Australia’s first hung Parliament since 1940 was testament to the unpalatability of both major parties’ sales pitches. Three ex-National Party MPs, turned independents, would decide who would form government,

after a Green and an ex-Green independent sided with Labor. It would take 17 days of negotiations before the pivotal pair of Rob Oakeshott and Tony Windsor chose to put Gillard back, despite Tony Abbott's Coalition having secured one more seat.

Three days after the election, on 24 August, the Sixth Battalion lost a third soldier in Afghanistan. Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney, 28, was killed during a gun battle in a river valley in Deh Rawood, in western Uruzgan. His death prompted debate about the level of air support being offered to Australian forces, after one of his colleagues wrote an email suggesting his death might have been avoided with more backup.

After MacKinney's death, Gillard and Faulkner held a news conference in Canberra. Gillard was asked about a spike in casualties and whether Parliament should debate the war for the first time since 2001. The Greens were pushing for a full parliamentary debate and Gillard would need their support to retain government. 'My view would be that it's appropriate for the Parliament to receive regular reports on the mission in Afghanistan and to debate and consider those reports as appropriate,' the Prime Minister responded.

The questions became more direct. 'Prime Minister, is this war being won in your view?'

> Well, the best advice available to me is that we are undertaking the mission we have set. We are undertaking the training of the Afghan National Army. It is, of course, taking some time. As I have publicly advised in the past, the anticipation is that in timeframes, completing that mission will take between two to four years, but good work is being done, progress is being made.

The question came again. 'Is the war being won?' Gillard paraphrased her previous answer, adding that the training was to prevent Afghanistan being a safe haven for terrorists. 'Progress is being made but this is difficult, dangerous work. There's no hiding from that. I've never sought to

do anything other than be as frank about that as I can be with the Australian people.'

After they left the room, Gillard and Faulkner looked at each other. 'That's the moment,' she said. They agreed the public attitude to the war had changed. Gillard told me, almost a year later:

> Up until then the tone of those press conferences had been completely respectful and all about the condolences and all about the grieving. And [at] that press conference … the tone changed to not harshly put but quite firmly put, in the questioning, why are we there?

17

AFGHANISATION

THE 2010 FEDERAL ELECTION changed the face of Australian politics. It didn't change the course of the war in Afghanistan but it did change the level of public debate at home.

The result was a 50-50 split, effectively a dead heat. After 17 days of deliberations, the Labor Party was returned to government—less by the electorate than by the independents and Greens who ended up with casting votes.

While the commitment to the Afghan operation had survived leadership changes in both major parties, dissenting voices outside had grown louder. Among the undertakings the Greens extracted in exchange for returning Labor to office was a promise to—finally—hold a parliamentary debate.

Prime Minister Gillard had some ministerial arrangements to finalise first. She acceded to the demand of her predecessor, Kevin Rudd, and made him Foreign Minister. Stephen Smith was moved to Defence, taking over from John Faulkner whose self-imposed deadline for returning to the backbench had arrived.

As with the transition from Fitzgibbon to Faulkner, this change was made smoother by the fact that the incoming minister was already a member of the National Security Committee. As a former foreign minister, he was also familiar with the broad operational issues in the portfolio. And the Defence hierarchy seemed to like him—at least, in the beginning. Within six months, however, relations would sour over the handling by both sides of potentially criminal student misbehaviour at the Australian Defence Force Academy, followed by a sizeable cut to Defence's budget.

Separate from the political turmoil in Australia, there had been some challenges in managing the war itself. The Dutch had begun preparing to

withdraw following the demise of the Balkenende government and the Australians had made it clear to NATO that they were not prepared to take over the lead in Uruzgan. ‘Our focus was to make sure that we had “enablers”,’ Defence Minister Stephen Smith said. By enablers, he meant the resources necessary to do the job properly—helicopters and other air support, mortars and artillery. For that, Australia considered there was only one ready option: the United States.

The US had wanted the Dutch to stay and, as a fall-back, for the Australians to take over the lead role in the province. But the Australian government’s strenuous resistance had begun under John Faulkner. He and Gillard were getting questions at home about who would be doing what in the wake of the Dutch departure, but the US took a long time to settle the matter, hoping to keep pressure on the Dutch for as long as possible. When the new military-civilian structure was finally agreed for Uruzgan, the US didn’t want to announce it. Still under pressure at home to spell out its future role, Australia insisted.

There had also been legal tensions reaching back to the beginning of the war, over the handling of detainees in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Australia refused to take responsibility for prisoners and those arrested by Australian soldiers were deemed to have been arrested by Americans. Government lawyers were anxious about the implications under international law. In 2011, Peter Cosgrove said:

> It was not our intention to be responsible for the custody of prisoners of war. And this was a moving feast in that it required time for it to emerge as a legal opinion. It was not, in my opinion clarified until we were in Iraq. It’s a bit like the gift shop sign—you break it, you own it. In this case, you capture it—even if you hand a detainee on to another country, you remain responsible. So the key point is who detained this person?

The issue was not resolved until Australia formally took responsibility for detainees when the Dutch withdrew from Afghanistan in 2010.

The Australian government had other concerns too. Having increased its troop numbers to 1550 in 2009, it believed it was doing enough. Smith said:

> We have to be very careful not to overstretch ourselves because we've still got operations in East Timor and the Solomons Islands. We always have to be conscious of something happening in our backyard and ensure we have the capacity to manage it … I was strongly of the view that it wasn't in our national interest to lead in Uruzgan.

Some senior members of the Defence Force disagreed, as did some in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. They believed Australia had the capability to step up and should do so. But the government said 'no'.

Instead, Australia negotiated with the US and the other allies working in the province—New Zealand, Singapore and Slovakia—to establish what became known as Combined Team Uruzgan, melding the military and civilian contributions. An American, Colonel Jim Creighton, was appointed as the overall military commander and an Australian, Bernard Philip, to manage the civilians.

Defence had also been pressing to remove the reconstruction element of the Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force and wanted to concentrate its efforts on training local security forces in order to be able to hand over. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade did not agree. Its Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ric Smith, had been trying to better coordinate all parts of the Australian commitment to help stabilise Uruzgan province, and ultimately withdraw. Reconstruction was not only about infrastructure but also aimed to build a visible, reassuring coalition presence in towns and villages. On the diplomatic side, they didn't want to dump it. 'I couldn't see the sense in that,' Ric Smith said. 'Some of the best work we were doing there was in construction.'

Reconstruction became the purview of the Provincial Reconstruction Team, which involved defence personnel for force protection, police to train and mentor their local counterparts and civilians working for Foreign Affairs, some of whom were AusAID officials, involved in local development: health, education, agriculture, water and basic infrastructure under a direct assistance program.

*

There remained significant differences within the military and the bureaucracy as to the value of the counter-insurgency effort overall. While some saw it as the only way to reach what is known as the ‘end state’—in this case, defined as having the province able to manage itself, and no longer requiring a significant Australian military presence—others doubted the value of reconstruction and mentoring and believed Australia should walk away.

The supporters argued that roads and bridges were permanent improvements with lasting effect. They helped connect different parts of the country, enabled farmers to get produce to market and were a visible sign of development and stability.

But those who opposed increasing the civilian dimension and the overall ambition of development questioned the cost and effort put in to building village mosques and repairing town infrastructure. They argued that it was no guarantee of support from local people, who remained aware that the Taliban were a permanent feature of their communities while the foreigners would never be.

And some doubted the assumptions being made in the counterinsurgency strategy as a whole: that Afghans even wanted to change to be more like ‘us’, that parents wanted their daughters to go to school, or that they wanted traditional methods of law enforcement replaced by modern policing. There were those who believed that it would be better for Afghanistan and the

allies alike if the foreign forces left, and that the instability only existed because they were there.

They preferred a version of the model US Vice President Biden had endorsed, in which the country was left to its own devices and any serious security threat was managed from outside its borders, through air strikes. The US military had strongly resisted that and its view had prevailed. The Karzai government resisted it too, fearing being abandoned. Although President Karzai was making regular calls for the foreign forces to get out of Afghanistan, he wanted a managed transition, not an up-stumps departure.

Karzai had been re-elected the previous year in a poll which was widely discredited as corrupt. In its 2009 post-election assessment, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan had reported: ‘Polling day recorded the highest number of attacks and other forms of intimidation for some 15 years. Regrettably, 31 civilians were killed, including 11 IEC (Independent Election Commission) officials, as well as 18 Afghan National Police (ANP) and eight Afghan National Army (ANA) personnel.’

In September 2010, the Afghan parliamentary elections were held and deemed, anecdotally, to be just as corrupt but with less official proof due to the paucity of international observers. One Australian observer described the 2009 poll in terms equally applicable to the one a year later: ‘You can’t see the body but you can smell it.’

*

In the Australian Parliament, the Greens and independent Andrew Wilkie were the only ones loudly questioning a continued deployment in Afghanistan—to be joined later by Liberal Mal Washer—but they weren’t alone in questioning its size and shape.

In the wake of the death of Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney, there had been public debate over whether the Australians had what they needed in Afghanistan. The email that had emerged from one of MacKinney’s

colleagues suggested that more firepower might have saved the soldier's life. 'The Army has let us down …' it said, 'and I am disgusted.' Shadow defence minister Senator David Johnston said the email proved Australia needed to better resource its commitment. On 30 September 2010, he said:

> Such support would be in the nature of a signal squadron, engineer squadron, cavalry squadron, gun regiment and elements of armour and aviation … I am advised that these additions would add substantial and immediate support capability to our soldiers in Afghanistan. These additions would require the deployment of a further 360 personnel.

It was the first sign of division between government and Opposition over the Afghan war. The Prime Minister defended the government's commitment and called on Opposition leader Tony Abbott to clarify his frontbencher's remarks.

Johnston also seized on calls from former Australian commander in Iraq Major General Jim Molan for Australia to expand its arsenal in Afghanistan to include tanks. The government wasn't taking his advice.

Abbott tentatively defended Johnston but tried to stay out of the debate and didn't appear to be completely convinced of his defence spokesman's position. Yet he had made his own call for extra troops in a speech to the Lowy Institute earlier in the year. 'If satisfied that the role made strategic sense and was compatible with our other military commitments, a Coalition government would be prepared to consider doing more,' he declared in April 2010. After visiting Afghanistan and being assured that troop levels were about right, he dropped calls for an increase.

*

As Gillard's government settled into place in October 2010, she was juggling the usual raft of overseas commitments which fill a prime

minister’s diary towards year’s end. There is always the annual APEC meeting and since the global financial crisis, regular G20 meetings too. In 2010, there was also a trip to Brussels for the Asia–Europe Meeting, a forum to which Australia hadn’t been invited before but whose early October timing proved useful on several fronts. Gillard would be attending a G20 meeting in Seoul, South Korea, in November, followed immediately by APEC in Yokohama, Japan. There would be some heavy-hitting leaders there, including US President Barack Obama. So Brussels wasn’t a bad warm-up.

As well, she planned to open the parliamentary debate on Afghanistan at home with a prime-ministerial statement on 19 October. It wouldn’t be a good look to make pronouncements on how long she might be asking Australian troops to stay in Afghanistan, when she hadn’t yet been there herself. Brussels became the perfect cover and allowed Afghanistan to become her first foreign destination as Prime Minister.

That cover was almost blown by the most sacred of days in her home city of Melbourne. The Australian Football League Grand Final had been held on 25 September, but the team with the biggest following, Collingwood, and the sentimental favourites, St Kilda, had managed to play only the third drawn match in the league’s history, and the first in 33 years.

Under the rules, a draw has to be replayed the following Saturday, in this case 2 October. At the traditional breakfast before the original Grand Final, Gillard made a prophetic joke, referring to what had happened to the Parliament just a couple of months earlier. ‘Please, please, we cannot have a draw,’ she said. ‘A week without a premiership football team—I’m not sure our nation’s strong enough to take it.’

The nation would have no choice. It would also prove strong enough to survive the Grand Final replay without a prime-ministerial presence. The football-mad Gillard had an Afghan appointment but made the excuse that she was en route to Brussels, which wasn’t entirely untrue. She deputised her Queenslander Treasurer Wayne Swan, whose first public duty as acting Prime Minister became cheering from the stands at the MCG.

But Gillard would not be the first minister of her government to travel to Afghanistan. Defence would not have allowed that. Stephen Smith went a few days before her.

*

In the week between the Grand Final and the replay, a difficult issue came to public attention which underlined the government's drive to reinforce its support for the troops.

On 27 September 2010, the Director of Military Prosecutions, Brigadier Lyn McDade, announced that three ADF members—later revealed to be two reservists and a regular army officer—who had formerly served on the Special Operations Task Group in Afghanistan were to face courts martial. The men were to be charged over an operation on 12 February 2009 in which six people had been killed and another four injured. All were later found to be civilians.

The rules of engagement—which are secret—stipulate what soldiers can and cannot do in a given theatre of war. Australian soldiers are taught to avoid injuring civilians, but sometimes insurgents deliberately base themselves among them. All Brigadier McDade would reveal about the incident was the scope of the charges. 'The accused persons will be charged with various service offences, including manslaughter, dangerous conduct, failing to comply with a lawful general order and prejudicial conduct,' she said. 'I will not make further comment, particularly in relation to the evidence or the merits of the cases, at this time.'

Others did not feel similarly restrained. The announcement drew howls of protest from those who believed the charges were unjust. The Prime Minister was asked to comment. Gillard told a news conference on September 27:

> This is a matter for an independent military legal process and I don't believe it's appropriate for me to offer comment on that or

> to be seen in any way to prejudge the outcome. The accused persons will be offered legal support. Obviously, overwhelmingly in relation to the ADF I would say the following—our Australian Defence Force has strict rules of engagement, and I think they've got the finest tradition and the finest reputation as they go about very difficult and dangerous work.

The questions persisted but Gillard would not be drawn on the circumstances of the case. 'The rules of engagement are clear and obviously … this is a question now of whether or not they've been abided by in a series of individual circumstances about which I don't want to be seen to make any comment.'

It wasn't enough for some. Broadcaster Alan Jones led the charge in defence of the three accused soldiers, reading out emails he had received from their supporters. He demanded that Tony Abbott do something: 'Now, is it your responsibility to take these concerns to the Parliament and have the Parliament overturn the decision of this woman?'

Abbott was treading carefully but was broadly sympathetic:

> I'm not sure whether we can overturn the decision of an independent prosecutor. But what we can do is try to ensure that the Government has done its job and I'm far from confident that this Government has done its job in terms of giving these soldiers the best possible defence.

The minister had offered his own careful defence in an interview with Radio National's Fran Kelly on 1 October. Stephen Smith said the legal process had to take its course:

> I very strongly believe that the Australian Defence Force and its personnel, its soldiers in theatre of war have a very well-deserved international and domestic reputation for being good soldiers, for

> following rules of engagement and for very carefully following the rules of warfare. And whenever there is a suggestion that that hasn't occurred, we are very diligent—from the Chief of the Defence Force down—very diligent about tracking those down to make sure that the highest standards are met.

On 13 October, Jones would take up the issue again, after Australian soldiers were told not to sign a petition protesting the charges.

> In what is quite a threatening letter, the Chief of the Army command warns his troops that they shouldn't sign a petition—that such conduct quote, 'might influence the outcome of the charges' unquote. Precisely. That is what we're seeking to do: to influence the public to understand that this woman—a Brigadier without a brigade, a woman who's never seen the signs let alone heard the sounds of battle—has too much power … and unless the public seek to influence the outcome of all of this, you can bet your life the gutless army command won't.

*

In the debate over the justness or otherwise of the charges, little has been said about what actually happened in the operation on 12 February 2009.

The incident over which the men were charged involved a planned operation to attack a building where insurgents were believed to be hiding. As is the practice in an operation like that, the soldiers sought and received legal approval to attack the nominated target from military lawyers deployed with the Defence Force. But at very short notice, the nominated target is understood to have changed. Part of what was at issue later was whether the attack on the building ultimately targeted had been legally cleared. During the operation, a grenade was thrown into the building and

women and children were inside. A second grenade was then thrown. It's that act which is the subject of the charges.

On 27 September, the day the prosecutor announced her intentions, two of the soldiers from the 1st Commando Regiment issued a public statement. In a highly unusual move, their military superiors had directed them to do it. The statement said:

> We will strenuously defend the charges and we look forward to the opportunity of publicly clearing our reputations, as well as the reputation of the ADF. Words will never adequately express our regret that women and children were killed and injured during the incident on 12 February 2009. These were people we were risking our lives to protect. However, it should not be forgotten that the casualties were ultimately caused by the callous and reckless act of an insurgent who chose to repeatedly fire upon us at extreme close range from within a room he knew contained women and children. This forced us to make split-second decisions, under fire, which almost certainly saved the lives of our fellow Australian and Afghan soldiers. We believe that when all the facts of this incident are made known to the public, it will be clear to everyone that we made the correct decision under truly awful circumstances.

On 20 May 2011, a judge advocate dismissed manslaughter charges against two of the men and on 23 June Defence confirmed no other prosecution would be pursued against them. The third soldier still faced court martial at the time of writing.

*

Gillard arrived at the Australian base at Tarin Kowt, in southern Afghanistan, on Saturday afternoon, 2 October, just as the AFL Grand Final

replay was starting back home. After a tour, she had a barbecue lunch with the troops. By then the game was over and Collingwood's victory was known. Gillard acknowledged that her visit was possibly not the most significant event of the day. She congratulated the winning team from afar. 'As a passionate Western Bulldogs supporter I managed to choke the words out,' she said. 'So, well done to Collingwood and all the Collingwood supporters in the crowd.'

At lunch, she went on to more directly address them as Australian soldiers, police and aid workers:

> I did want to make sure that my very first trip as Prime Minister was to here, to come and see you and say hello to you … I know many of you probably think that politicians can talk a fair bit and that's probably right. But there's really one word that I've come to say to you and that word is 'thankyou'.

Gillard acknowledged that serving on operations was made more difficult by the recent increase in casualties.

> I know that that does take guts and determination and bravery, and it particularly takes it after a period of time where you've seen so many of your friends and comrades and colleagues fall victim to death in the battlefield. And I may not have been Prime Minister for a very long time, but I've certainly attended a large number of funerals. I've had cause to grieve with the families … with some of the people from this place who have returned to Australia for those funerals and I've certainly thought about how that would be impacting on you, what it would be making you think and feel as you've seen that loss of life, as you've seen people wounded. But one thing that's always come home to me … is that despite those losses, your courage and determination to get the job done continues undaunted.

During a briefing at the Tarin Kowt base with the head of Combined Team Uruzgan, Colonel Jim Creighton, and the Australian commander, Major General John Cantwell, the issue of firepower and support arose. Aside from a request to the Dutch to leave some helicopters and pilots behind—to which they later agreed—the American told her: ‘We have what we need.’

Gillard travelled to Kabul for talks with President Karzai and US commander David Petraeus, and then headed for Brussels with a quick lobbying stop at the Federation of International Football Associations (FIFA) headquarters in Zurich to mention Australia’s twin bids to host the 2018 and 2022 World Cup. In all, her Afghan whirlwind amounted to a 20-hour stay in country.

It emerged upon Gillard’s arrival in Brussels that she had invited Opposition leader Tony Abbott to accompany her to Afghanistan but that he had declined. Abbott thought the leaking of her invitation and his response was opportunistic. Before Gillard had confirmed she was going to Afghanistan, and after they had attended a funeral together, Abbott had mentioned to her that he was planning his own trip on the way home from attending the Conservative Party conference in Britain. Soon after, she told him she would be going a few days before that and asked if he wanted to come.

By the time the Prime Minister reached Brussels, the declined invitation was news. Abbott blamed her staff. But his indignation took a body blow when he was asked on arrival in London why he hadn’t taken up the Prime Minister’s offer. ‘I thought it was important to do this trip justice,’ Abbott said. ‘I didn’t want to get here in a jet-lagged condition so I’m in a position to make the most of this opportunity.’

The jetlag remark didn’t go over well. Almost immediately he had to set about cleaning up his own mess. Within hours of his faux pas, Abbott told Ross Greenwood on radio 2GB:

> The last thing I would want to do is to give anyone the impression that my comfort and convenience is more important than visiting our troops. In fact, I have long planned a visit to Afghanistan, it will be taking place quite soon. I can't give the exact details for obvious reasons. The Prime Minister and her office were well aware when I declined to go with her this weekend that I would shortly be going myself.

Gillard managed to nudge the issue along by observing in response to questions about managing jetlag and priorities that she had slept well. But she too suffered for ill-chosen words during an interview at the end of her Brussels trip. ABC TV presenter Kerry O'Brien asked her if she had found her 'comfort zone' yet in international diplomacy. Gillard told him:

> I'm just going to be really upfront about this: foreign policy is not my passion. It's not what I've spent my life doing. You know, I came into politics predominantly to make a difference to opportunity questions, particularly make a difference in education. So, yes, if I had a choice I'd probably more be in a school watching kids learn to read in Australia than here in Brussels at international meetings.

She had to do a bit of her own cleaning up and foreign affairs became a passion, quick smart.

With the harsh media glare, mercifully, elsewhere again, the Opposition leader stuck to his original plan and visited the troops in Afghanistan on his way home from London. He told them in Tarin Kowt:

> I didn't particularly want just to fly in, say a few words, have a look around and leave … I had rather hoped that I would have the chance to stay for a few days and to experience some of the tasks that you perform. I had rather hoped to be embedded in a unit as a

> journalist might be. It probably was an unrealistic hope. In fact, I was told by the Army chiefs that journalists were expendable in a way that the leader of the opposition might not be. When I heard that I thought, why does the Army have such low opinions of journalists?

Abbott used to be a journalist himself, before politics. ‘As I listened to the briefings from your senior officers this morning, I thought to myself, “well look, you know, I couldn’t even win an election, so I wouldn’t be much use in a firefight.” So, it’s probably just as well that there was no embedding.’ Nevertheless, he tried his hand at firing a few semi-automatic rounds filmed by the Defence Department’s camera crew. The images were blocked from distribution by Abbott’s office on return to Australia.

That decision would also come back to bite him, when Channel Seven was later granted access to the withheld vision under Freedom of Information laws. The network’s political editor Mark Riley made much of another sequence in which Abbott was recorded talking to US commander, Colonel Jim Creighton, about the firepower available when Lance Corporal MacKinney had been killed. He had been assured that nothing more could have been done.

‘Sometimes shit happens, doesn’t it?’ Abbott said, meaning to sound sympathetic, to which a soldier replied, ‘it certainly does, yeah.’ Channel Seven’s story was far from sympathetic, and Abbott learned that shit did indeed happen and if you tried to cover it up, sometimes it just spread further and smelled worse.

*

The parliamentary debate on Afghanistan began on 19 October. In her opening address to the House of Representatives, Julia Gillard outlined how she saw Australia’s ongoing role. Her message was that Australia could not

afford to walk away. ‘Australia’s national interests in Afghanistan are clear,’ she said. ‘There must be no safe haven for terrorists.’

Gillard said the mission was ‘not nation-building’ but protecting civilians, training and mentoring the security forces and promoting governance and socio-economic development. She reported ‘tentative signs of progress’—an increase in the number of trained soldiers and police, an improvement in service delivery and five million more students in school than a decade earlier. ‘Some two million of these enrolments are girls,’ Gillard said. ‘There were none in 2001.’ Australia was ‘making a real difference,’ she insisted. ‘Transition will take some years. We will be engaged through this decade at least.’

Suggesting Australia could be engaged there for another ten years or more, came as a surprise to many. ‘Good government in the country may be the work of an Afghan generation,’ she said. ‘There will be many hard days ahead but I am cautiously encouraged by what I have seen.’ The speech was light on detail about the future level of commitment, but heavy on the principle that a rapid withdrawal would spell trouble for Afghanistan, the wider region and Australia’s own security.

Tony Abbott supported her speech and said the best exit strategy was ‘to win’. And he noted the shift in public opinion. ‘After nine years of inconclusive fighting, the risk is that the PR war will be lost at a time when the ground war is finally starting to go better,’ Abbott said. ‘Our instinct would be to do more, rather than less.’

The first dissenting voice came from the lone Green MP, Adam Bandt. Bandt decried a law enacted under the Karzai government which subjugated women:

> The government that passed this law last year is a government we are told that our soldiers should kill and die for. It is now clear that the war in Afghanistan cannot be won, however you measure victory. It is now clear that the reasons successive governments have given to be in Afghanistan no longer stand up to scrutiny. It

> is also now clear that the main reason we are there is not to defend democracy or human rights but simply because the United States asked us to go and wants us to remain.

Bandt looked to Afghanistan's history, including Russia's failure to defeat the Mujahideen, despite a mighty army: 'We cannot close our eyes to the lessons of the past and be doomed to repeat them. Wilful blindness is no better than wishful thinking.' Bandt announced that he would do as his colleague Scott Ludlam had done in the Senate and introduce a bill which would require a decision of Parliament to deploy troops abroad. That issue would inspire a whole other public debate.

In Parliament, the debate on Afghanistan wound on through both houses for a month. Some MPs put their own soul-searching on display, others their associations with service personnel. They offered support for the Australians working in Afghanistan and sympathies for the bereaved. They reflected on Australia's military history and on the ANZAC legacy, quoted generals and prophets and pondered justice, vengeance and peace. There were pleas to stay, and pleas to go.

But of all the offerings, Gillard's speech would capture most attention.

*

In Brussels, where NATO is headquartered, Australian ambassador and former defence minister Brendan Nelson did as instructed and circulated Gillard's Afghanistan speech among representatives of fellow ISAF countries. He also circulated Abbott's speech to demonstrate there was unity of government and opposition. Soon after, his phone started ringing.

Some European leaders whose populations were more actively hostile to involvement in the Afghan conflict were naturally more reluctant to commit to such a long time line. Several expressed amazement that Gillard had been willing to suggest Australia might be involved for another ten years. Some privately also had their jaws on the floor that the Prime Minister had been

so willing to cite upholding the US alliance as a reason to stay in Afghanistan—an argument their own populations would never accept. The Australian government hoped the ten-year pledge might help serve to stiffen the spines of some who were wavering. ‘On this particular issue, I feel very proud of our political leadership,’ Nelson said. ‘And by that, I mean both the government and the Opposition.’

In Washington, President Obama told Australia’s ambassador, Kim Beazley, that he thought Australia’s position as articulated in the Prime Minister’s speech was ‘shockingly good’.

Gillard finally discussed the issue in person with Obama at the G20 meeting in Seoul, South Korea, in early November. They held their first formal bilateral talks on the sidelines of APEC in Yokohama, Japan, a few days later. Obama said:

> The United States does not have a closer or better ally than Australia. We are grateful for all the work that we do together. I expressed my personal thanks to the people of Australia through the Prime Minister for the enormous sacrifices that are being made in Afghanistan by Australian troops.

After the twin summits, Gillard was expected in Lisbon, Portugal, for a NATO meeting discussing Afghanistan, but first she dashed home for the end of the parliamentary debate. After 100 speeches in the House of Representatives, it was ended by the person who began it:

> The Government has sought to paint a very honest picture of our mission in Afghanistan. We do face real difficulties and challenges and we have sought to share our best judgment. There will be many hard days ahead but we are cautiously encouraged by what we have seen.

Although the debate wasn't her idea, Gillard believed it was positive. In an interview in 2011, she said:

> I think unless people are engaged with it and understanding something about why we're there, then the only engagement they ever have with it is when we've lost a soldier … obviously a tragic time and the time at which people are most likely to say to themselves and to each other 'why are we doing this?' So if you can be answering the 'why' question outside that context of loss and death, I think that that helps sustain if not support, at least understanding.

*

After her brief sojourn at home, Gillard headed for Lisbon. There had been a series of meetings over the previous year aimed at getting a more coordinated Western approach to the Afghan conflict and this was the latest.

In London, in January, representatives of 70 governments had gathered to discuss a new strategy which the then British Prime Minister Gordon Brown called 'Afghanisation'. Brown told the conference on 28 January:

> I have described our shared strategy as one of Afghanisation—building up the Afghan institutions, army, police and civilian government, so that as they become stronger we can hand over the responsibility for tackling terrorism and extremism and our forces can start to come home. It will take time but I believe that the conditions set out in the plan we will sign up to today can be met sooner than many expect, and as a result the process of handover district by district will start later this year.

'Afghanisation' was a risky historical reference. In 1969, former US President Richard Nixon's strategy of 'Vietnamisation'—transferring

responsibility for fighting the Viet Cong back to the South Vietnamese in order to get the US forces out—heralded the country's final fall to the North.

In the Afghan context, they aimed to avoid a similarly ignominious retreat. While nobody was suggesting the coalition departure from this conflict might also be via helicopters from an embassy rooftop, there was—and remains—some concern at the mess the war has become and the risk that the country might fall back into the hands of fundamentalists. So the Afghan version was relying heavily on the notion of withdrawal being 'conditions-based'. There would be a tentative deadline for 'transition', but only if certain security conditions were met.

The London conference decided to set up an international trust to help fund peace talks with those Taliban sympathisers who might be persuaded away from their activities by an alternative source of income. The country's major creditors, including the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, would provide US $1.6 billion in debt relief, and the percentage of foreign aid channelled through the Afghan government was to be raised to 50 per cent. But in return, Karzai had to establish an accountability board to properly tackle corruption.

The conference set numbered targets for training members of the Afghan army and police and endorsed a 'civilian surge' to match the military surge. It also approved the appointment of former British ambassador Mark Sedwill as NATO's Civilian Representative to head it and resolved to work to strengthen provincial governments to help with service delivery on the ground. Australia pledged $100 million to reconstruction, mine clearance, agriculture, human rights and Taliban reintegration. The 2010–11 AusAID budget would almost double aid to Afghanistan. Julia Gillard said in an interview:

> We, at a diplomatic level, continue to push President Karzai and his administration hard on questions of anti-corruption work … We're also very focussed on capacity building in the area where

> we work, in Uruzgan, which is why we were very pleased to see the appointment of the Governor and we had pressed for that hard.

That was also a kind of insurance against failure at the national level. The disillusionment with Karzai was such that the allies increasingly put their energies into provincial governance instead, boosting the strength of governors as a means of achieving stability at the local level. From the outside, it seemed like an admission of failure. Their hand-picked central government in Kabul could not be relied upon, so to find the solid governance that is at the heart of successful counter-insurgency, they were looking elsewhere.

Australian National University professor and Afghanistan specialist Professor William Maley counsels against relying too heavily on provincial governors to deliver nationally cohesive development. There is an Afghan national development strategy which contains motherhood statements about tackling the drug trade and pursuing good governance, but it does not contain guidance on how to prioritise scarce resources to achieve its objectives. Maley suggests not a lot of attention is paid to it.

> I remember once saying to an Australian official, ‘How will you ensure that what you’re doing in Uruzgan is consistent with the Afghan National Development Strategy?’ And the reply was, ‘Oh well, we will work with the provincial governor’. And I said, ‘And what makes you think that the provincial governor will be paying the slightest attention to the Afghan national development strategy?’ And there was no answer.

Maley argues that consistency is in short supply in the governance systems being introduced under the network of provincial reconstruction teams, too. Different countries manage their PRTs differently, and the relative wealth of the country in charge is, literally, material to its approach.

A PRT funded by the United States and its aid arm, USAID, has much more to plough into a local community than those funded by countries of the old eastern bloc with fewer of their own resources:

> I'm not sure that they do any worse as a result because money that is injected recklessly into these kind of climates can become a stake over which groups begin to struggle. And unless you have a very acute understanding of the local political complexities, the danger you run in this kind of situation is that you create a conflict formation by your aid efforts.

Maley's analysis took me back to a trip to Rwanda in 1995, eight months after the genocidal rampage by forces loyal to the Hutu government against the minority Tutsi population and its sympathisers. I visited a Rwandan displaced persons camp in January 1995, and spent hours with some of the children there among the 60,000 people too frightened to return to their villages. We had—naively—brought some small things to give out, including sweets, and one of my colleagues threw a handful into a crowd of children from the back of a truck. The result was a horrifying scene of desperate children prepared to attack each other for some kind of treat. It taught me a life lesson about what 'aid' can do if delivered without forethought.

In Afghanistan, the coalition forces also face the complexities of local power struggles. Some are siding with warlords in order to achieve short-term aims—like getting supplies from one town to another and seeking local help to fight insurgents. Australia is among them. The ADF has formed an increasingly strong relationship with local warlord Matiullah Khan and his supporters. Khan runs a militia estimated at about 2000-strong which guards the road between Kandahar and Tarin Kowt, where the Australians are based. Foreign militaries and others pay him to ensure safe passage for resupply convoys carrying goods and for troops. His reputation among local people is extremely mixed. The ADF has also enlisted

Matiullah Khan's supporters to help fight those attacking the foreigners and have brought a group of them to Australia for training.

CDF Angus Houston defended that decision in an interview with ABC TV's *Lateline* program in October 2010.

> Those six people who came here are going to be fighting side by side with our Special Forces when we do the next deployment. If we want to get our act together, so that we have an absolutely seamless operation, it's absolutely imperative that we train with the people that we are going to be fighting side by side with … This was a very sensible thing to do in these circumstances because it enhances the safety of our people.

Maley disputes that presumption. So does his fellow ANU academic Professor Amin Saikal. Saikal argues that choosing to arm certain groups within the complex Afghan society risks creating powerful militias which could become difficult to control. He also warns of the power struggle which could ensue between various groups and the Karzai government. 'Nobody knows how it is going to go when the Americans complete their withdrawal in 2014,' Saikal said.

In December 2010, the then Australian commander in the Middle East, Major-General John Cantwell, described the criticisms of the ADF's relationship with Matiullah Khan as being the 'northern suburbs of Sydney view', that local allies in Afghanistan should be somehow wholly pure when the historical reality was that few were. 'Matiullah Khan might not be the most angelic character but I've got to know him pretty well, he's effective, he does what he says he'll do, he's achieved things we've asked him to achieve,' Cantwell told *The Age*. 'He's our guy and we should work with him.'

Not according to William Maley. 'That's very worrying,' he said. 'Because nobody is our guy.'

*

At the London conference, Karzai was in attendance and in agreement.

> This conference offers us the opportunity to discuss the way forward toward an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned initiative that ensures peace and stability in Afghanistan and its surroundings … Moving towards peace, reconciliation and reintegration is what all Afghans agree on. We must reach out to all of our countrymen, especially our disenchanted brothers.

Promising to establish a National Council for Peace and Reconciliation and Reintegration, he described world peace and stability as 'inextricably linked to peace and stability in Afghanistan … We the Afghan people assure you of our commitment and hard work toward reaching our shared vision.' But over the months which followed, the governments of the US coalition would remain unconvinced.

In July, the United Nations co-hosted a follow-up conference in Kabul. At a news conference afterwards UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, alongside President Karzai, reiterated the conditions being placed on the new 'transition' strategy. Both men took questions, translated into English from the Afghan language, Dari. Ban said:

> The international community would expect and strongly encourage that President Karzai and his Cabinet will enhance good governance, and address all the socio-economic problems, irregularities and make reform; socio-economical reform and security reform … I am quite convinced that while this transition is made, toward a gradual transition from greater responsibility of Afghanistan, I am sure that the Afghan Government and people will be able to enjoy freedom, human rights and prosperity.

Karzai confirmed 2014 as the target date for what Gordon Brown had called 'Afghanisation'. That was when Afghanistan hoped 'to reach a level

of strength and ability and capacity within our forces to provide for our own security for the population, for the country, for our borders'.

*

In Lisbon, Prime Minister Gillard joined Karzai, President Obama and other leaders from the ISAF countries at the NATO summit. The strategy for transferring security responsibility from coalition forces to Afghan agencies was being finalised, and Gillard was one of 16 non-NATO leaders in attendance, along with 28 NATO leaders and the chiefs of the UN and NATO itself.

The British elections of 6 May had delivered a change of government and an end to 13 years of Labour rule. The new Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron, said the Lisbon conference signalled a new stage for Afghanistan, too. 'This week's NATO summit in Lisbon is set to mark the starting point for passing responsibility for security progressively to Afghan forces,' Cameron said on the eve of the meeting. British forces were to begin drawing down from 2015. But US President Barack Obama was on a tighter timeline for what nobody liked to call an exit strategy, with US presidential elections approaching within two years. He wanted to be able to show the transition was underway by the time he hit 2012.

Although he didn't describe it in the same terms, Karzai had laid down his own timeline for withdrawal—Afghans managing their own security by 2014 and allied forces out.

Karzai himself posed no less of a dilemma for the allies than when the 'Afghanisation' strategy had been laid out. The US-led coalition had backed him strongly, but remained concerned about both his leadership and the nature of his government. Privately, American diplomats were telling their superiors he had mental health problems and was on medication. Allegations of corruption were accepted wisdom, and all the frustrations which had prompted the demands of the London conference remained in place.

*

Ahead of the Lisbon summit, international aid agency Oxfam urged the leaders to ensure their actions didn't undermine their own objectives. It was concerned that assistance to local security agencies was simply arming local militia whose practices demonstrated little regard for protecting civilians. 'Recruits are barely vetted, receive little training and are often accountable only to the local commanders,' Oxfam and 28 other agencies said in a joint statement. 'Far from helping to stabilise the country, they are likely to contribute to the growing instability.'

The independent Afghan Human Rights Commission's Nader Nadery shared the concerns. 'The fact that we are already seeing abusive behaviour by militias in Afghanistan should be sounding a warning bell,' Nadery said in the same statement. 'There is still time to get the right controls in place in Afghanistan. But ISAF must act now.'

The 29 international non-government organisations prepared a report for the Lisbon conference which said that 1271 civilians had been killed in the Afghan conflict in the first six months of 2010, a 21 per cent increase on the previous year. While they said insurgents were responsible for most of the deaths, there was a growing perception of Afghan government forces as 'violent, abusive and above the law'.

On arrival in Lisbon, Gillard was asked for her response to the NGOs' report. She answered by referring only to the security situation in Afghanistan and plans for transition and did not address the report at all.

Separate from the NGOs' findings, Australian military and police trainers on the ground in Afghanistan were experiencing their own frustration with clashes between local law, culture and practice and the principles they were trying to instil.

Afghan trainees would travel long distances to visit family on days off and not always return on time. There were anecdotal reports of Afghan commanders summarily dealing with those deemed to be deserters via the barrel of a gun. And some within the Australian Defence Force were

extremely ill at ease with the accepted sexual practices of the local men, which involved liaising weekly with young local boys. Within the Australian Defence Force, they referred to this colloquially—and uncomfortably—as ‘man-love Thursdays’. It remains an issue the Australian soldiers find very difficult to deal with.

*

Before Lisbon, the US had already begun its own strategy towards transition. President Obama had authorised a ‘surge’ of 30,000 US troops to try to give some teeth to the counter-insurgency effort. But the US didn’t want to surge alone.

Through military and NATO channels in the second part of 2010, the US sounded out Australia for an increased commitment. Defence Minister Stephen Smith denies there was a formal request. According to Richard Armitage, still deeply involved with the Washington security establishment, Australia was sounded out, even as the surge was beginning. ‘My understanding is the Department of Defense was looking for greater contributions,’ Armitage said. ‘And Australia is saying: “Look, enough is enough. We got other issues”.’ Armitage said the suggestion came before the official transition timetable was adopted—the precursor to withdrawal. Nevertheless, he believed it was stretching the friendship.

> It would be counterintuitive to expect any ally, particularly Australia, to be more involved if we start to lessen our involvement. And so that would be unreasonable with respect to the alliance and it won’t be expected. I mean, it’s stupid. If we’re pulling out, even in small amounts, to expect Australia to increase. I mean come on … We weren’t pulling out at the time we asked.

Smith agreed there had been ‘soundings out’ but denied they had ever reached the status of a government-to-government request. He confirmed there had also been requests for Australia to take on new roles: ‘From time to time we’ve had what we would regard as genuine requests, to look at whether it’s possible for us to do niche or specialised training. When we’ve been able to, we have responded positively.’ But it had always been done within existing numbers.

Armitage was not surprised that Australia would be disinclined to entertain sending more troops. ‘I think Australia’s given as much as she’s going to give on this issue,’ he said.

The government thinks he’s right.

*

After a sideline meeting with Karzai in Lisbon, Julia Gillard said the ISAF forces and the Afghan government were ‘on the same page’. But increasingly, Karzai was looking like a token presence.

If a sign was needed that the ISAF countries were gently setting him aside, it came at the final, grand triple-header news conference. In his trademark hat and long, green-and-blue coat, Karzai was invited to join NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to answer questions from the world’s media.

The second question was from Safar Mahmoud, from One TV Afghanistan, and it was a double-header. The first half was in English, to Rasmussen. Was NATO committed to supporting Afghanistan beyond 2014 and helping protect it from any external threat? And what did he think about Pakistan ‘interfering in Afghanistan external affairs’?

Rasmussen assured him the agreement just formalised to remain in support while transferring security, province by province, to local authorities was ‘a clear signal to the Afghan people’ that ISAF would stay beyond its combat end date: ‘It’s also a clear signal to the region that we

will not leave behind a security vacuum that could create instability in the region.'

The second part of Mahmoud's question was to Karzai. To English speakers, 'Washington Post' were the only distinguishable words. The question appeared to refer to a recent Karzai salvo in that newspaper over civilian deaths in his country. We waited with interest for the translation of both the question and Karzai's response. Instead, over the loudspeaker came an announcement: 'I'm sorry, we have no interpretation for this language.'

It was a remarkable admission. At a conference discussing Afghanistan, to which the Afghan president had been invited, and where he was to address the international media, there was no translator for the languages he might speak. As Karzai responded to Safar Mahmoud, the rest of the room of non-Afghans, including the two leaders standing beside him, had not a clue what he said. When the official transcript was posted on NATO's website, the question and answer were still not translated but instead summarised as: 'speaks in foreign language'. My Afghan-born colleague, co-host of SBS' *Dateline* program, Yalda Hakim, speaks in several 'foreign languages' and has obliged with a translation.

Mahmoud's question was asked in Farsi, the Persian language spoken in Iran and parts of Afghanistan.

> SAFAR MAHMOUD: Mr President, in your interview with *The Washington Post* you expressed your concerns in relation to the night military operations of the American forces and the national deaths. Firstly, have you voiced your concerns with the NATO forces here today? And secondly what are your views on the role of Pakistan? Is Pakistan the solution to the problems in Afghanistan or not? Thank you.

Karzai answered in a mixture of Farsi and another Afghan language, Dari.

> HAMID KARZAI: In relation to the request of the people of Afghanistan for the end of national deaths, capture of people and night operations, not only have we had thorough discussions here but also in Afghanistan. And today, I have also expressed my views to NATO in relation to this, and luckily our partners in NATO are in agreement and hold the same views as us. In relation to Pakistan, Pakistan is a neighbour of Afghanistan and only through friendship and a strong relationship, and a great relationship can we, God willing, solve the problem of terrorism faced by both nations.

It wasn't an earth-shattering response, although at the time we had no way of knowing. But the incident illustrated a broader point. NATO might not have expected the Farsi language to feature, but no Dari interpreter either? And, months after the fact, still no English translation.

It spoke volumes about NATO's regard for Karzai's input.

*

Like others among the ISAF nations, Julia Gillard and Stephen Smith left Lisbon convinced the allies finally had a strategy. Nobody wanted to call it an exit strategy, but that was what it was.

It had four parts, as Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd outlined during the parliamentary debate: counter-insurgency to undermine opposing fighters; transition to local security authorities; negotiation with former insurgents towards a political solution; and engagement with Pakistan. It would take a long time but the government could now see a way out. In Uruzgan, transition to locally run security would take two to four years, at least. But the government would begin in earnest tailoring its messages and talking up progress, to that end. The awarding of a Victoria Cross to Corporal Ben Roberts-Smith in early 2011 for 'conspicuous gallantry' during an operation in Kandahar province on 11 June 2010 provided another opportunity.

Corporal Roberts-Smith said progress was being made and Gillard quoted him frequently.

In February 2011, Australia's casualty numbers rose to 23 with the deaths, two weeks apart, of Corporal Richard Atkinson and Sapper Jamie Larcombe, both of the 1st Combat Engineer Regiment. Atkinson was killed by a roadside bomb on 2 February, and Larcombe was shot by insurgents on 19 February. Atkinson was 22 and Larcombe, 21.

Gillard told Parliament that attending soldiers' funerals was the hardest thing she had ever done but that she remained convinced Australians were sacrificing their lives in a just cause. In 2011 she said pulling out, as some were demanding, was not the answer. 'We're there for a purpose,' Gillard said. 'There's no point ticking boxes, exiting quickly only to see it all go back. And that's what I mean when I consistently say we should not transition out only to have to transition back in.'

Australia had done that before in an alliance without a plan, which was precisely why its soldiers were still fighting there a decade on. 'Where we are now in terms of military and political strategy and the resources to implement that is where we want to be,' Stephen Smith said of the transition strategy. 'There's only one problem. We are half a dozen years late.'

18

CAPTURE OR KILL

FOR US PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA, there was one significant obstacle to executing any plan to eventually withdraw from Afghanistan. The man considered ultimately responsible for the September 11 attacks—the whole reason the US and its allies were there in the first place—had never been apprehended.

During his campaign for the White House in October 2008, Obama had made a bold promise: ‘We will kill bin Laden, we will crush al Qaeda. That has to be our biggest national security priority.’ He was asked about it again in a January 2009 interview with CBS news anchor Katie Couric. Some critics thought he was watering down his pledge. ‘My preference obviously would be to capture or kill him,’ Obama said. ‘But if we have so tightened the noose that he’s in a cave somewhere that he can’t even communicate with his operatives, then we will meet our goal of protecting America.’

But as the year was drawing to a close without bin Laden, and with plans being drafted for a ‘transition’ of security from the US-led allied forces to Afghan authorities, the goal set by his predecessor back in 2001 had not been met. On 6 December 2009, ABC America political commentator and former Clinton White House press secretary George Stephanopolous interviewed Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Defense Secretary Robert Gates. He asked Gates when the administration last had any decent intelligence on bin Laden’s whereabouts. ‘I think it has been years,’ Gates said.

A week earlier, former Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry had overseen the preparation of a report by the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee into the Battle of Tora Bora in Afghanistan in December 2001, in which bin Laden and his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, were believed to

have escaped into Pakistan. The report found that that escape had been responsible for ‘laying the foundation for today’s protracted Afghan insurgency and inflaming the internal strife now endangering Pakistan’.

Then, on a warm Washington Sunday night in 2011, as April gave way to May, President Barack Obama made an unexpected address to the nation. In Canberra, Prime Minister Julia Gillard had no special warning of either the address or the operation it would reveal, save for a message delivered through Australia’s security agencies to her during a Cabinet meeting alerting her that the President was about to speak, and what it was about. When he did speak, she was among those listening.

‘Tonight I can report to the American people and to the world that the United States has conducted an operation that has killed Osama bin Laden, the leader of al Qaeda,’ Obama said. It was a stunning development. Bin Laden had been the FBI’s most wanted fugitive with a US $25 million bounty on his head. He had become an almost mythical figure, except for the messages he still occasionally delivered via the al Jazeera television network. The most recent, in January 2010, was directed at the US President personally. ‘From Osama to Obama,’ the translated audio message said, going on to demand that the US end its support for Israel and back a Palestinian state. But now it seemed bin Laden’s mortality had been dramatically confirmed by an inauspicious end.

In his 1 May national address, Barack Obama revealed that shortly after taking office in 2009, he had instructed CIA director Leon Panetta to make it a top priority to get bin Laden. It had taken 18 months for anything resembling genuinely useful information to emerge. Then in August 2010, he had been briefed on a possible lead.

After many months of surveillance, the US government had become convinced that bin Laden was holed up in a large, high-walled, triple-storey compound in the city of Abbottabad in Pakistan, not far from the capital, Islamabad, and right near a military academy. He was, it seemed, hiding in plain sight. Two men, who appeared to be acting as couriers, had been observed going in and out of the compound regularly, and there were some

oddities. Strangely, for such an elaborately secure establishment, it seemed to have no internet connection and no telephone. And the rubbish wasn't put out for collection—it was burnt.

The President established a working group to examine all possible scenarios, from capturing the elusive terrorist leader to killing him and disposing of his body. They worked out where bin Laden would be taken in the event he was apprehended, alive or dead. After extensive surveillance, CIA and military operatives made a scale model of the compound and a group from US Navy SEAL Team 6—the most covert of the Navy's Sea, Air and Land teams—underwent rehearsals for an attack. On 29 April, Obama gave the order for the meticulously planned operation to proceed on 1 May. Before that he had a string of public engagements, not least the annual comedic performance at the White House correspondents' dinner, the night before.

On the CBS *60 Minutes* program a week after he revealed the success of his risky operation, Obama described the time between making the decision on the preceding Thursday night and the execution of his order on Sunday. He had told his staff and closest advisers of the decision on Friday morning as they flew to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, to inspect the damage from a brutal tornado which had shredded homes into matchsticks. He had then gone to Cape Canaveral for what had been intended as a space shuttle launch but, with the lift-off deferred, ended up being an inspection of facilities and a tour of the spacecraft.

After that, the President went on to make a graduation speech at Miami Dade College in South Florida. His heart was on show, even if part of his mind was elsewhere. Obama gave a personal and reflective speech about opportunity and determination. He couldn't resist a tiny reference to the event he was about to avenge when he told the graduating students:

> When bombs fell on Pearl Harbor, when an Iron Curtain fell over Europe, when the threat of nuclear war loomed just 90 miles from this city, when a brilliant September morning was darkened by

> terror—in none of those instances did we falter. We endured. We carried the dream forward … Sometimes it took years, even decades, for us to find our way through. But here's the thing. We made it through. We made it through because in each of those moments, we made a choice.

He knew the choice he had already made and in two days they would know too, when it was revealed to the world as either success or failure. 'Pursue success,' he told them. 'Do not falter.'

*

Barack Obama was acutely aware of the risk he was taking. History was littered with just such failed attempts at heroism.

'You think about *Black Hawk Down*,' he told Steve Kroft on the CBS network's *60 Minutes*. He was referring to the book and subsequent movie which told the story of US forces' disastrous attempt in 1993 to capture Somali warlord Mohammed Farrah Aidid in what became known as the Battle of Mogadishu.

> You think about what happened with the Iranian rescue. And I am very sympathetic to the situation for other Presidents where you make a decision, you're making your best call, your best shot, and something goes wrong, because these are tough, complicated operations. The day before, I was thinking about this quite a bit.

The bungled Iranian hostage rescue of 30 years earlier clearly sat very close to the top of his mind. On 4 November 1979, 66 Americans had been taken hostage in the US embassy in Tehran in protest at President Jimmy Carter's support for the Shah of Iran, whose government had been overthrown in a revolution in February of that year. After a handful of the hostages escaped and others were released, 52 remained captive for a total

of 444 days. The attempt to rescue the hostages on 24 April 1980 ended in disaster, with two military aircraft destroyed and eight American servicemen and one Iranian civilian killed. The 52 would be detained for nine more months, and finally released on the day Ronald Reagan replaced Carter as President and at the very moment he finished his inauguration address.

In the Abbottabad operation, there were eerie early shades of both the Somali and Iranian endeavours. There was huge political risk. This was a covert operation on foreign soil and an infringement on the sovereignty of a nation which was supposed to be an ally but whose incapacity or unwillingness to act had prompted this unilateralism.

There was obvious physical risk too. As at least three US Blackhawk helicopters landed inside the one-acre compound, they were reportedly fired upon with rocket-propelled grenades. One helicopter stalled and hit a wall. After the raid, the soldiers destroyed it, prompting speculation that it was a new stealth-style aircraft containing technology the US did not want examined.

The Navy SEALS had video cameras with them, and across the world inside the White House Situation Room, the President and Vice President, the secretaries of State and Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and their national security advisers watched the raid unfolding, live.

What happened next became the subject of correction and clarification and the White House did not manage the message well. In the Briefing Room the following afternoon, Press Secretary Jay Carney reminded journalists how many times Obama had vowed to hunt down bin Laden:

> In August of 2007, he said: ‘If we have actionable intelligence about high-value terrorist targets and President Musharraf won’t act, we will’. In July of 2008, he said: ‘We must make it clear that if Pakistan cannot or will not act, we will take out high-level terrorist targets like bin Laden if we have them in our sights’.

But when it came to how bin Laden was actually killed, the early details were not reliable. Carney and the President's Assistant for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, John Brennan, told journalists that bin Laden had been killed in 'a firefight' and that the woman 'who was shielding bin Laden' had also died. It eventually transpired there was no exchange of fire—the SEALS were the only ones who fired in the room where they found bin Laden, and his wife had been shot in the leg, had not been shielding him and had survived.

The confusion only added to the scepticism of those disinclined to believe Obama's announcement. Some sceptics demanded to see photographs to prove it was indeed Osama bin Laden who had been shot in the head and chest and then buried—wrapped in a white sheet according to Muslim practice—at sea to avoid any onshore site attracting Islamist pilgrims. But the White House decided the photographs were too gruesome and could inflame anti-American sentiment. They were shown to some members of Congress, but weren't officially released.

*

Pro-American sentiment, however, was inflamed all by itself. Before the President had even begun his Sunday night address, word had spread of what it was about.

As the US networks ramped up their coverage in anticipation of Obama's confirmation, signs of a particularly patriotic self-confidence, missing from America for nearly a decade, began to re-emerge. On air, senior political analyst for CNN Gloria Borger quoted an email she had received that night from a source in the US Senate. It was a simple, rhetorical question: 'What does it now say about our ability as a country to project power?'

The nation which had been knocked down on September 11 and had still not recovered, felt in a single moment that it was getting up again. Its people's feeling of a lack of control over economic crises, natural disasters

and threats unseen had been overtaken—at least for this moment—by the sense that their President was in charge. ‘The death of bin Laden marks the most significant achievement to date in our nation’s attempts to defeat al Qaeda,’ Obama said from the East Room of the White House. ‘Justice has been done.’

Around Washington, jubilant Americans poured out into the night, swarming down through Lafayette Park to the White House fence, whooping, cheering and chanting the three initials of their nation’s name. The triumphal patriotism would be galling to some watching around the world. While America’s vulnerability to attack had been shocking ten years before, not everyone had found its prior belief in its own invincibility entirely endearing either. Had it taken just this one act for that triumphalism to return?

But this wasn’t a night for American self-analysis. The crowds outside the White House swelled and stayed until the early hours. This time it wasn’t the sombre and shattered ‘bring a candle and a flag’ of that September night back in 2001 around the pool of reflection below Capitol Hill. This time they just came, again singing ‘God Bless America’, but now with fists in the air. And this time they were celebrating—claiming not only justice, but vengeance.

*

In Canberra, Prime Minister Julia Gillard declared Australia’s support for the operation which had, as US officials described it, chopped off the head of the snake. ‘Osama bin Laden declared war on innocent people and today he has paid the price for that declaration,’ Gillard declared at a Monday afternoon news conference soon after the announcement of the al Qaeda leader’s death.

> I trust that today’s news comes as some small measure of justice for those that still grieve the loss of their loved ones … I

> welcome the death of Osama bin Laden. I welcome this news. And I thank President Obama and the US forces who have made this possible.

But she warned Australians against thinking that the death of bin Laden meant the demise of his terrorist network which, the following month, would appoint Ayman al-Zawahiri as its new chief.:

> I do also want to be very clear. The death of Osama bin Laden is not the end of al Qaeda. That is why here in Australia we will continue to do what we need to do to keep the nation as safe as we can from threats of terrorism.

Four days later, on 6 May, Julia Gillard congratulated Obama in a telephone call. He was on Air Force One on his way back to Washington after visiting troops of the 101st Airborne Division, known as the Screaming Eagles, at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

As Gillard later reported to Parliament, she thanked the President and through him those involved in the operation in Pakistan. Just before Question Time on Budget Day, Gillard told the House:

> We have in the White House a man of character, of sober judgment and of intellectual clarity … The operation against bin Laden is not the end of our journey. It is important and it will make a difference but the job is not yet done. Our resolve endures and our purpose remains right and we will prevail.

Obama had expressed similar sentiments when he had addressed the troops at Fort Campbell:

> We’re still the America that does the hard things, that does the great things … We’re the nation that always dared to dream.

> We're the nation that's willing to take risks—revolutionaries breaking free from an empire; pioneers heading West to settle new frontiers; innovators building railways and laying the highways and putting a man on the surface of the moon.

Unable to make a public display of thanking Navy SEAL Team 6 because of its secrecy, he was visiting a division with its own experience of battles in Afghanistan and its own vivid place in American history. (Hollywood would, in any case, likely take care of the SEALS—the Disney Corporation applied, soon after, to trademark the name 'SEAL Team 6'.) So Obama thanked the 101st Airborne as representing all whose service he said had contributed to the US effort to dismantle terrorist networks:

> We are the nation—and you're the Division—that parachuted behind enemy lines on D-Day, freeing a continent, liberating concentration camps. We're the nation that, all those years ago, sent your Division to a high school in Arkansas so that nine black students could get an education. That was you.

In 1957, a thousand members of the 101st Airborne Division had been sent to protect nine students trying to attend Little Rock Central High School as a result of the US Supreme Court ruling that schools should be racially desegregated. 'Because we believed that all men are created equal,' Obama reminded them. 'That everyone deserves a chance to realise their God-given potential.' And, as he had done with the students at Miami Dade College, he also reminded them that their country had stared down adversity in the past and prevailed.

> We're the nation that has faced tough times before—tougher times than these. But when our Union frayed, when the Depression came, when our harbor was bombed, when our country was attacked on that September day, when disaster

> strikes like that tornado that just ripped through this region, we do not falter. We don't turn back. We pick ourselves up and we get on with the hard task of keeping our country strong and safe.

*

In the light of day after 1 May, that hard task was very evident. The government of Pakistan was unimpressed that US forces had undertaken a covert operation—and killed people—on its soil.

Obama had thanked Pakistan for assisting with counter-terrorism which, he said, had helped lead to bin Laden's capture. But it was quickly clear that neither the Pakistani security establishment nor that country's government itself had been involved in the operation to capture bin Laden, or was even notified that it was taking place. That fuelled suspicions in the West that within those organisations there may have been people who had been helping him remain at large.

At the 2 May briefing in the White House Briefing Room, John Brennan said it was 'inconceivable' that bin Laden could not have had a support system inside Pakistan. Obama repeated the assertion in his *60 Minutes* interview. 'We don't know whether there might have been some people inside of government, people outside of government and that's something that we have to investigate,' Obama said. 'And, more importantly, the Pakistani government has to investigate.'

On 9 May, Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani told Pakistan's Parliament that his country would hold a military-led inquiry into the circumstances of bin Laden's life and death in Pakistan. But he remained defiant. 'Allegations of complicity or incompetence are absurd,' Gilani said. 'We emphatically reject such accusations.' In Washington, the US administration was equally unrepentant. White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said the President reserved the right to do the same again: 'It's simply beyond a doubt in his mind that he had the right and the imperative to do this.'

Nevertheless, the US was treading carefully with Pakistan—and so was Australia. At her news conference welcoming the announcement of bin Laden's killing, Julia Gillard made sure to positively acknowledge Pakistan: 'I also take this opportunity to thank Pakistan for working with them [the US] on ensuring that Osama bin Laden was brought to justice in this way.'

The careful diplomacy was with good reason. As a nuclear-armed state residing in a volatile part of the world and in an often-hostile relationship with its neighbour, India. Pakistan, the US believed, was not a country it was wise to alienate—even if its agencies weren't universally helpful in the quest to dismantle networks declaring jihad on the West.

But some, including the ANU's William Maley, believed it had been time to get tough with Pakistan long before bin Laden was killed. Maley argued prior to the killing that the US should be using its leverage with Pakistan—substantial in terms of financial aid—to demand action to dismantle the insurgent networks using Pakistan as cover. 'It's awfully tempting to think that the way to deal with the Pakistanis is to be sweet,' Maley said. In this vein, the Americans had long been convinced they knew the best way to deal with Pakistan. Maley argues the turn of events proves they didn't:

> This is where Karzai has a legitimate concern. Karzai for years has been warning the Americans about this and the standard American reply for years was: 'Be quiet, we'll handle that. We know how to handle Pakistan.' Karzai—I think rightly—has decided that this is all hogwash, that the Americans don't know how to handle Pakistan. And he's now facing the consequences.

*

The Australian government, like the rest of the coalition, was conscious that the death of Osama bin Laden could have consequences for its personnel on

the ground in Afghanistan. Three weeks later, when another Australian soldier was killed, it faced questions about a possible link.

On 23 May 2011, during a foot patrol in an unspecified area of southern Afghanistan, 32-year-old Sergeant Brett Wood of the 2nd Commando Regiment was killed by a roadside bomb which also wounded two others. Defence Force chief Angus Houston described him as ‘a magnificent soldier’ with extensive operational experience, having served in East Timor, Bougainville, Iraq and on three deployments to Afghanistan. He was also highly decorated and had been awarded the Medal for Gallantry in 2006 for his actions under insurgent attack in the Chora Valley, in Uruzgan province.

Houston revealed that in a separate incident, another three soldiers were wounded during a gun battle with insurgents. He dismissed any suggestion that the killing of bin Laden had affected the nature or level of attacks on Australians. ‘We haven’t seen anything in Afghanistan at all related to the death of bin Laden,’ he said. ‘And what we are seeing is the start of the fighting season.’

Exactly a week later, on 30 May, there came another terrible reminder of that, with two more Australians dying in separate incidents on the same day. Lieutenant Marcus Case, aged 27, of the 6th Aviation Regiment, was killed when a Chinook helicopter crashed in Zabol province, wounding five others. Earlier that day, Lance Corporal Andrew Jones, a 25-year-old cook from the 9th Force Support Battalion, was shot dead by an Afghan National Army soldier with whom he was sharing guard duty in a sentry tower at Patrol Base Mashal in the Chora Valley. Announcing the deaths ‘with immense sorrow’, Houston described it as ‘a very bad day’.

The death of Lance Corporal Jones represented a new and disturbing development in the war. While this had happened to other countries’ forces, it was the first time an Australian soldier had been killed by one of his own trainees, a so-called rogue Afghan he thought he could trust. The attacker fled under fire from an Afghan National Army colleague who had discovered the wounded Australian. An investigation was already underway into the circumstances of the shooting when the Taliban claimed the

missing ANA soldier had been a ‘sleeper’ insurgent. True or not, it provided them with a propaganda opportunity. The Prime Minister acknowledged the likely impact of the incident:

> I understand many Australians will … be shocked and it will be causing them to ask questions … but I will be asking people at this really difficult time to think about the full breadth of what we’re doing in Afghanistan. We have trained thousands of Afghan National Army soldiers. We’ve worked alongside them. Our soldiers have worked alongside them. I personally, when I’ve been in Afghanistan, have heard our soldiers compliment members of the Afghan National Army on their professionalism and their determination … Then, of course, we’ve got this really troubling incident and we’ve got to get to the bottom of it.

The following day, in the shadow of these three deaths, the government made an announcement the defence establishment had long awaited—the appointment of a new CDF to replace Houston, who would retire in July. His Vice Chief, Lieutenant General David Hurley, was to be promoted. In accepting his appointment, Hurley acknowledged the proximity of the three deaths and the particular impact of Lance Corporal Jones’ shooting. He said the process of vetting Afghan recruits, already very thorough, was being reviewed.

> These sorts of events, you know, send messages right up through the chain of command for people to be looking at each of those steps again to ensure our people can be safe as they can be, but we won’t be able to prevent all this in the future. I mean, 400,000 people—the Taliban are an active enemy and we’ve got to deal with this, warts and all.

On 7 June, Houston announced the death of another Australian, Sapper Rowan Robinson, shot the night before, during a raid on a weapons cache in northern Helmand province. He described the 23-year-old combat engineer, as a ‘fine’ young soldier of great promise. But the loss of the 27th soldier and the fourth in two weeks was not, he said, reason to doubt the need to remain in Afghanistan.

> When you lose somebody there’s always a sense of loss. There’s sadness but there’s also a steely resolve that, okay, this sacrifice will not be in vain. We need to continue with our mission. We are making a difference and we are going to train and mentor these 4th Brigade soldiers so that we can leave here in a year or two. That’s how we’re going. We’re going well.

On 20 June, Defence Minister Stephen Smith identified the rogue Afghan soldier who killed Lance Corporal Andrew Jones as Private Shafied Ullah. Smith revealed that Ullah had himself been killed in a joint operation with US forces. ‘We would have preferred if Shafied Ullah was captured so he could offer reasons for the shooting,’ Smith said. Three days later, on 23 June, US President Barack Obama announced a two-stage withdrawal of 33,000 troops—10,000 in 2011 and 23,000 by late 2012. Marking US Independence Day a day late on 5 July in Canberra, US ambassador Jeffrey Bleich said allied forces would follow. ‘We’re going to be moving side by side with the Australians and as those forces start to reduce we’ll expect to see commensurate movements by all of our allies around the world,’ Bleich told journalists. It wasn’t soon enough for 35-year-old commando Sergeant Todd Langley, who became the 28th Australian to die in the conflict, killed on 4 July 2011 on his fifth deployment to Afghanistan in a gunfight with insurgents which also wounded a colleague. But it was the beginning of the end of the war. The exit from Afghanistan was underway.

19

2020 VISION

THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN is a war of retaliation, fought, at least initially, on fury—a state in which the best long-term judgments are not always made. It was meant to avenge the September 11 attacks and ensure against a repeat. The people of Afghanistan were not the main players in the conflict but their country became the main stage for a bigger war, the so-called war on terrorism.

From the start, the American-led retaliation was less a war on a state, than on a set of ideas. The September 11 attack which provoked it was mounted not by a government, but by a non-state-based militia. It was neither a claim for physical territory in the United States nor part of a wider, formal military campaign like the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. It was an assault on a belief system, a set of behaviours and on a way of life. So the primary return target was the al Qaeda network, led by Osama bin Laden and deemed directly responsible for the attacks.

The author of President Obama's 2009 policy review on Afghanistan and Pakistan, former CIA officer Bruce Riedel, has argued that al Qaeda's attack was designed to force exactly the kind of response America provided:

> Their objective was to provoke the United States and its allies to retaliate: specifically, to invade Afghanistan and enter into a long and bloody war of occupation in a repeat of the Soviet struggle there in the 1980s. Al Qaeda believed that the United States would bleed to death in the mountains of Afghanistan just as the

> Soviet Union had bled into collapse at the hands of Afghanistan's Muslim guerrilla warriors, the Mujahideen.

Supporting al Qaeda, the Taliban, was a more visible enemy but initially less directly threatening. They alone could not have launched a September 11-style attack, but giving succour to those who did—hosting bin Laden and his supporters before the attacks and refusing to give him up afterwards—earned them a place in the crosshairs. Al Qaeda had made the Taliban indebted by killing their great rival, the Northern Alliance chief Ahmad Shah Massoud, the day before their September 11 assault, which they called 'the Manhattan raid'. The Taliban's refusal to surrender its chief architect was deemed an act of war.

The Taliban's great value to al Qaeda was that they adhered to a similar Islamic fundamentalist ideology and, being in government, were in a position to offer substantial protection. In 2001–02, the US-led forces wanted to remove the Taliban from office and dismantle al Qaeda. Their mistake was in thinking that by doing one they had done both.

Former secretary of the Foreign Affairs department Michael L'Estrange—who also served as secretary to the Howard Cabinet and high commissioner to Britain—suggests it wasn't only the Labor Opposition which looked upon Afghanistan as the better of two wars:

> Where people make these distinctions between wars of necessity and wars of choice—which I think is always a little bit arbitrary—I think people saw Afghanistan as a war of necessity.

*

Prime Minister Julia Gillard has made it clear Australia is not interested in doing again in 2014 what it did in 2002—pulling out and having to turn around and go back.

Former defence minister Robert Hill suggests Australia's withdrawal is only a matter of time. 'They will [withdraw],' Hill said. 'Because you can't stay.' Former Defence Force chief Chris Barrie believes it's a decision which will ultimately be made by others. 'The Americans withdraw, we'll withdraw,' Barrie said. 'We won't stay in Afghanistan a minute longer than we have to.'

That's certainly how it was last time around. In withdrawing Australia's forces in 2002, former Prime Minister John Howard says he relied on military advice that the situation had stabilised and Special Forces were no longer required:

> I don't think the decision in 2002 was wrong. The military advice we had was that we ought to withdraw. It was always intended that we would have highly trained effective forces there for a short period of time. That happened. The Taliban proved to be more resilient.

It was Defence Force chief Peter Cosgrove who gave the advice:

> I think the signs were there that the task for the Special Forces was shrinking. This was reflected in the drawdown of US Special Forces and other [countries'] … Australia should never be and I don't think in 2002 was in the manner of saying, 'oh, here's a war we can stay at'.

Former special operations commander and now National Security Adviser Duncan Lewis concurs:

> It seemed that our time in Afghanistan had sort of come to an end at that point, and it was clear to me that we couldn't just stay in Afghanistan forever. And the Government was, I think, always intent on withdrawing at some point or another. They wanted to

> get out at the best opportunity, the earliest opportunity … And I think events had just come to a point where there was a break in the traffic and it was appropriate and time to leave.

Howard's then chief of staff, Arthur Sinodinos, says that at the beginning, it was clear 'who the baddies were':

> It was a very black-and-white sort of scenario. So none of the sort of nuances, shades of grey that you have now would have been … really in the frame … I think the view was, 'If we can knock the Taliban government over, get a more sympathetic government which will help drive the terrorists out, then it should all be over in relatively straightforward terms.' Now maybe that's an ex-post rationalisation. It sort of felt like that at the time … I think people feel, based on the information at the time, the decision was the right one to make … But no one could foresee there might be problems with the new governing structure … In hindsight, it's clear that getting rid of the Taliban did not guarantee that miraculously Afghanistan would change.

Like the rest of Cabinet, the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, supported the withdrawal. 'There was a general view that the mission had been accomplished. I remember wondering what would happen in Afghanistan … but not in the context of feeling like we were getting out too early.'

Former Defence Minister Robert Hill believes it was equally right to go back in. Some people would 'probably come to the conclusion that we should've all gone home and stayed home after the first, successful phase', he said. 'But I don't think that would've been the right thing to do either. But maybe we should've been a bit more realistic in what was achievable.'

Former Foreign Minister Alexander Downer concedes that banishing the Taliban from government did not amount to destroying them. But he

maintains that the conditions for withdrawal had been met and that Australia had also met its own national objective: ‘It’s not as though we didn’t think there would be any peacemaking afterwards. There clearly would be. We knew that. But we didn’t really want to be involved in that.’

*

But in talking of peacemaking in 2002, they were getting ahead of themselves. The primary enemy against whom they were making war had not been defeated.

The US and its allies dramatically underestimated how far the al Qaeda influence might spread. Australia’s ambassador to the US at the time, Michael Thawley, says they thought it would be containable:

> When we were talking about this in 2001, we thought we would destroy al Qaeda’s base and that we would go out and that the chances were that they wouldn’t be able to re-form, and if they did, we’d come back in again … At that point we didn’t envisage that we would face … Pakistan.

Instead of being routed, al Qaeda melted away into mountains and caves and across the border. The failure to capture bin Laden and other senior leaders when they had their best opportunity, at Tora Bora, was a blunder which would have enormous ramifications for years, possibly decades. It gave al Qaeda victory enough to strengthen and expand.

By 2011, what began as a network based largely in Afghanistan and Pakistan, with tentacles into Yemen and elsewhere in the Horn of Africa, had become a global franchise. Former Chief of Army and now Director of the National Security Institute at the University of Canberra, Peter Leahy, likens the al Qaeda business model to a fast-food chain: ‘People are saying very clearly that it’s no longer an operational unit, it’s this ideological base with a number of independent franchise units out there.’

Along with al Qaeda's Ayman al-Zawahiri, the man credited with becoming the ideological guru of al Qaeda and its South-East Asian spin-offs, Jemaah Islamiyah and Laskar-e-Toiba, was an Egyptian activist, writer and Islamic theologian, Sayyid Qutb. Qutb died in 1966 but his writings are said to have formed the inspiration for al Qaeda and its now-deceased leader. He was also chief theologian for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Before the US Navy SEALS killed bin Laden, Leahy said:

> They were the people who came up with the ideologies and it's bin Laden who became the motivator … You track the ideological roots back into Egypt … And if you look at some of their writings you'll see that they are some of the most dogmatic texts that you'll see anywhere. So even [after getting] Osama bin Laden it's not over … Frankly we're going to fight this for decades.

Leahy cautions against too much Western jubilation over what's been called the 'Arab spring'—the democratic uprising across the Middle East. He is among those who fear the Brotherhood's influence in Egypt after the fall of the government of deposed undemocratic leader Hosni Mubarak. Within months, Leahy warned of a risk that what would emerge would be anything but democratic.

*

In 2002, the allies trounced a government in Afghanistan but they didn't trounce its ideas or the other networks promoting them. To do that, they needed to fully dismantle the al Qaeda leadership structure. They also needed to prove that alternative ideas were better able to empower the Afghan people to develop and make changes, so they might become strong enough to withstand unwelcome extremism in future.

Instead, they went off to fight another war. Thinking they had won the Afghan war and could—or should—move on to Iraq was not the Americans' first error. That was the failure of intelligence—primarily in the United States—which allowed the planning for September 11 to proceed undetected in the first place. Invading Iraq was, arguably, the second.

It's clear that senior figures in the US defence establishment were eager to invade Iraq immediately after September 11. Some critics linked the advocacy of the then US Vice President and former Defense Secretary Dick Cheney to his association with the oil industry services multinational conglomerate Halliburton, which became a multi-billion dollar beneficiary of the Iraq War and other conflicts through the numerous construction and supply contracts it was awarded. But he wasn't alone. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, were also pressing the President to act against Iraq. After what looked like an easy victory in Afghanistan, Bush listened more intently.

On September 11, America felt that it had been violated. The advocates' arguments about Iraq were boosted by the whole administration's singular determination not to have it happen again. So the first intelligence failure led to another—the misreading of intelligence on Iraq—and what began as erring on the side of caution became erring on the side of war. Those gathering intelligence didn't want to suggest there was nothing to fear from Saddam Hussein and then be blamed if they were found to be wrong. Those analysing what was produced did not want to be accused of missing the signs.

There was another ironic by-product of that first intelligence failure and the Americans' response, as Alexander Downer observed: 'One of the consequences of this was the establishment of the 9/11 Commission and the consolidation of US government information systems—which has led to the Wikileaks.'

*

The war against Iraq was different to the one in Afghanistan, wrapped around it. In Iraq, the enemy was a single dictator and the state he ran. Deliberately or not, the US transferred responsibility for the ideology it was fighting in Afghanistan to the government of Iraq, which was a visible, fightable, institutional enemy. In Iraq, enemy fighters wore uniforms and belonged to an army—that is, until the US dismantled it and sent them all off, unpaid and disillusioned, to rise up again and turn on those who had come to liberate them.

Two Australian Special Forces soldiers who fought in both Afghanistan and Iraq observed a distrinct difference between the conflicts. Unlike the Afghan insurgents, the Iraqis were conscripts. ‘There’s a lot of people who were in the defence force in the Iraqi army that were there against their will because it’s just the way it is over there,’ one former SAS soldier said.

His colleague said the Australians took that into account: ‘You could deal a lot with them without going into a conflict … They said, “Look, I just want to go home.” So you would send them home. You would say, “Well, give us all your stuff, give all your weapons and go home.” And they would.’

‘Yeah,’ the first soldier added. ‘You’d say, “War is over for you. You go that way.” They’d just walk away … They’re a threat with this weapon. [But when they say] “I want to give up,” they’re no longer a threat.’ His colleague said the Australians worked that way when they could: ‘If you can do that without taking someone’s life, isn’t that a good thing?’

What wasn’t a good thing, according to senior military figures and some political leaders, was dismantling the Iraqi army once victory there had been declared. Then Brigadier and later Major General Maurie McNarn, who represented Australia in the planning phase and commanded Australian forces in the Middle East during the war, said disbanding the Baathist army was not in the original plan. ‘That was the biggest mistake,’ he said. It put up to half a million Iraqis with military training into the field, most of them resenting the United States for leaving them without jobs and income. ‘We

could've taken the heavy weapons off them, cantoned them and paid them,' McNarn said.

Instead, the US gave the soldiers a one-off payment of US $20. The decision was made by Walter Slocombe, a security adviser to the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, Paul Bremer. 'We don't pay armies we defeated,' Slocombe said in 2003. Bremer's predecessor, retired General Jay Garner, confirmed to *Vanity Fair* magazine in February 2009 that it hadn't been in his strategy:

> My plan was to not disband the Iraqi army but to keep the majority of it and use them. And the reason for that is we needed them, because, number one, there were never enough people there for security … So we said, 'Okay, we'll bring the army back.' Our plan was to bring back about 250,000 of them. And I briefed Rumsfeld. He agreed. Wolfowitz agreed. Condoleezza Rice agreed. George [Tenet] agreed. Briefed the President on it. He agreed. Everybody agreed. So when that decision [to disband] was made, I was stunned.

Australian Opposition leader Tony Abbott also believes that decision was critical:

> There should have been more consideration given to what would happen after the successful military campaign against Saddam Hussein and his forces … Disbanding the Iraqi army and sacking the Baathist public service probably wasn't a very good idea because it meant that there were a half a million unemployed people with guns and no one much knew how anything worked. I think that was, with the wisdom of hindsight, a serious mistake.

The Australians had protested at the direction of the planning from early on. 'There was no coherent plan to put the place back together,' McNarn

said. ‘I actually briefed that back home before the war even started.’

Now-retired Chief of Army Ken Gillespie, who was head of strategic operations at the time, is highly critical of what he said was the prevailing US attitude in Iraq:

> America fought and won wars and the rest of the world cleaned them up … It was very hard to convince [them] … that you couldn’t just fight the war in Iraq and leave refugees and all the rest of it to somebody else to clean up. From the day that you went past the first village, you had a refugee problem.

Gillespie defends the Australian military’s acceptance of intelligence on weapons of mass destruction:

> From the intelligence we had and how it was presented, the WMD was a really key issue. And I’ve got a clear conscience on why we went, believing that it was there … The military plan at all levels was focussed at finding the weapons. People believed that they were there.

The Opposition at the time didn’t believe it. Ambassador to the US, Kim Beazley, says the doubts were confirmed when he, Kevin Rudd and then Opposition leader Simon Crean went to Washington for the annual Australia–US leadership dialogue in June 2002, and sought a briefing on the available intelligence from the CIA. ‘At the end of it we said to the CIA blokes: “It’s pretty thin.” And they said, “Yep”. So we came back with a considerable amount of doubt about it,’ Beazley said.

In 2011, members of the current Labor government still insisted Iraq was wrong, badly handled and a distraction from Afghanistan. But Prime Minister Julia Gillard also believes that under Mark Latham her own side badly handled the twin issues of Iraq and the US alliance with implications, ultimately, for Afghanistan:

> I think there were some huge errors made during the Latham period but they were about Iraq—troops out, you know, deprecating comments about the US, those kind of things—they were all in the context of Iraq rather than there being some big strategic error made about Afghanistan. Now I think it would be fair to say you can't wholly divorce the two. If you are seen to be saying rash and irresponsible things about Iraq then that is going to affect people's image of you both domestically and internationally, so then when you seek to express a view about Afghanistan, you take that baggage with you so. So I think the errors flowed over in that sense.

In somewhat of an understatement, Joel Fitzgibbon, another formerly close friend and colleague of Latham's, is more circumspect: 'I think Latham's comments on Iraq probably alerted us to the need to reinforce our alliance credentials.'

Gillard says the then Opposition was mindful of the lessons of Vietnam, when young Australian soldiers were made pariahs for doing their jobs. Labor had wanted to oppose the Iraq War and demand more be done in Afghanistan but always supported the soldiers.

> I think we did the appropriate amount of pushing in Opposition. These are always difficult questions … From Vietnam we've learnt a strong lesson about how political divides can unfortunately become divides that then impact on serving men and women. So I think, for an Opposition, there's always a question of tone and calibration here that we very strongly felt … We didn't want to, at any point, give anyone the sense that we thought our serving men and women were doing the wrong thing, as opposed to … having a different view about the decision the Government should have taken.

Defence Minister Stephen Smith acknowledges that what he calls ‘the Iraq distraction’ became a distraction for the Opposition too, but that ‘it’s very hard to run a war from Opposition’. Gillard believes history has vindicated Labor’s position on both wars: ‘An eye was taken off Afghanistan in order to train both eyes on Iraq. And I think that was a strategic error.’ Fitzgibbon agrees: ‘There’s no doubt that the decision to withdraw to refocus on Iraq was a mistake and something we paid for and are still paying for … We lost a huge momentum.’

Despite how messy it became, senior members of the former Howard government maintain it was the right thing to do. Opposition leader Tony Abbott is among them. ‘I think what the so-called coalition of the willing did was right, it was necessary and it was certainly to the benefit of the wider world, and certainly of the people of Iraq,’ Abbott said. He described George W. Bush, Tony Blair and John Howard as ‘heroic’: ‘Because where you do see very serious threats to international security, where you do see a very serious case of a regime which is monstrous to its own people and you can make a difference, I think that you should at the very least think about trying to.’

Alexander Downer has no regrets and says neither does Howard. He’s right. Both believe getting rid of Saddam Hussein was justified. ‘I really don’t [have any regrets] and I think the verdict of history will be kinder to the Americans and … us,’ Howard said.

*

One of the questions emerging from Australia’s alliance-based engagements over the past decade is whether it should ever say ‘no’ when the US calls.

Australia’s special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ric Smith, believes in the case of Afghanistan, the interests of the US and Australia are intertwined. ‘It’s the same thing,’ Ric Smith said. ‘You turn it around: would anyone be there if the Americans weren’t? No. Nobody would.’

Stephen Smith says it's a matter of opinion whether joining the US on military operations is an independently made Australian decision based on the country's national interest or just doing what America wants. To him too, they are one and the same: 'A strong alliance is unambiguously in Australia's national and national security interests and that will continue to be the case for a long period of time.'

Some in the Gillard government concede an inherent contradiction between their positions on the alliance and on Iraq. Although they still think the Iraq War was wrong, they acknowledge Australia's participation has deepened the US alliance. Stephen Smith said: 'I think that reflects over the last decade the practical cooperation on the ground and the strategic cooperation has seen the alliance at an all-time high.'

Senior members of the Howard government believe it's essential to go when the US calls. Former Finance Minister Nick Minchin argues we need the Americans more than they need us:

> Where there's an opportunity to show our bonafides in a genuine way we ought to take it—given reasonable risk assessments—because there are not many occasions on which we can legitimately do that and because … it's not a matter of Australia ever being in a situation where we come to America's rescue. It's always going to be the other way around.

But committing to join a military operation on the grounds of national interest carries another inherent obligation, according to former ambassador to the US Michael Thawley: 'The logic is, if we commit forces it's for an Australian national interest. The alliance is part of that but … if you think it's in your national interest to get a particular outcome then you have to make a contribution which will actually make a material difference.' In the case of Iraq, some in the military—in Australia and abroad—and in the bureaucracy believed this was something Australia didn't do.

Howard's main motivation was to be seen to uphold the US alliance because of the potential benefits for Australia in lending its flag to the cause. Former US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage confirms how important that was—and is—to the United States: 'The notion of the alliance is that we will fight and die to protect each other … So I don't want to get maudlin on it, but for some of us, this is a very sacred thing.'

Australia's reputation was invaluable. In other words, getting Australian endorsement of a military operation is like getting the Heart Foundation tick of approval on a supermarket product. It helps it sell.

*

After a decade, though, Afghanistan has become a hard sell, and Australian public opinion is catching up with the hostility already evident in other countries of the Western alliance. It forced the Dutch out of combat operations, and likewise the Canadians—whose less specialised deployment and willingness to operate in the toughest provinces of Helmand and Kandahar have cost them dearly. Its potential to worsen in the United States—and the looming 2012 presidential election—is driving the 'transition' timetable and drawdown of US troops from mid-year, 2011.

The bipartisan support for the Afghan conflict in Australia has staved off a full-scale public debate on the merits of staying versus going. In 2011, senior figures from the defence community were urging the Opposition under Tony Abbott to take a different stance. They were suggesting it shouldn't be accepting a ten-year timeline, it should demand a plan for getting out. But Abbott wasn't taking their advice. 'I can't imagine the Coalition ever criticising the government for doing too much in Afghanistan,' Abbott said. 'I guess there could conceivably be some criticism of them if they precipitately withdrew our forces, and to her credit Gillard doesn't appear disposed to do that.'

Abbott's one criticism of his own side's past handling of Afghanistan relates to juggling two wars:

> With the wisdom of hindsight, if there was any mistake it was perhaps somewhat neglecting Afghanistan while the Iraqi campaign was at its height. But that wasn't an argument for abandoning Iraq and focussing on Afghanistan. That was an argument for being better at doing two things at once … They were both countries that had a very serious internal terrorist threat that was substantially motivated by Islamism, and I think it was very important that the West did whatever it reasonably could to combat the thing. So I just think that the Iraq campaign and the Afghanistan campaign—like the Italian campaign and the Normandy campaign [in World War II]—were all important elements in defeating Islamist terrorism.

Others draw different historical parallels. John Anderson uses the language of the Vietnam War in reflecting on Afghanistan:

> In view of what we knew, the information in front of the government at the time, I stand by those decisions. I would say that I have a concern that Afghanistan is and always has been almost a quagmire for other countries to involve themselves in. But the stakes have never been anything like as high as they are now … I'm a farmer so I've often found myself in quagmires and you just have to keep going until you come out the other end … There is this concern, I think that people are saying it'll be another Vietnam, it's becoming another Vietnam … People say that to me.

Howard rejects comparisons with Vietnam, save for one—in the Taliban's approach in 2011 he sees parallels with the Viet Cong and its Tet Offensive propaganda triumph:

> I have a view that the Tet Offensive—the public relations of that—was a disaster for the United States. It wasn't a military disaster, it was a public relations disaster. They [the allied forces] didn't lose the Tet Offensive by any means … They lost the PR war.

Independently, Defence Minister Stephen Smith cites the same example:

> What we may now see is the Afghanistan/Taliban equivalent of the Tet Offensive. The Tet Offensive, was a much more effective propaganda effort than it was a military strategy. It was very effective. And the big difficulty here is in terms of continuing to have domestic and international community support … given we've been there for ten years.

The duration of the war has, by itself, become an obstacle to success, however that ends up being defined. Howard believes it is one of the biggest.

He says one of the great risks of allowing a war to run too long is that people lose sight of any gains which might have been made. In Afghanistan, he says:

> I think people have more rights, they don't have adequate rights. And once again this is a problem with a long involvement. You start comparing the rights immediately post the Taliban with the Taliban. And as time goes on you inevitably start comparing them with conditions in Australia and inevitably the comparison gets worse and worse. And this is a huge problem.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard is also conscious of the influence of time:

> It's never been popular for us to have forces fighting so far away. Maybe immediately after 9/11 people got it and understood the national interest—the national interest characteristics of it. But the further and further we've got away from 9/11, I suspect popularity of it was always diminishing.

At the heart of the duration issue is what Alexander Downer calls 'mission creep', from which he insists the conflicts in both Iraq and Afghanistan have both suffered. Contributing to the sense of being bogged down has been US confusion over the kind of operation it was mounting—counter-insurgency or counter-terrorism—and years of internal disagreement over how to proceed. As revealed in Bob Woodward's book *Obama's Wars,* one of Obama's wars has been with his own military.

Nick Minchin says the length of the war was never envisaged but perhaps should have been. The reservations he claims to have held about Iraq—which his colleagues say he never expressed—were not there for Afghanistan. But maybe they should have been. Minchin said:

> I think even at the time we were all conscious this wasn't going to be a five-minute picnic. I guess, yeah, we're all surprised ten years later it's still going on. Although perhaps when you know the country and the nature of the Taliban you shouldn't be surprised.

*

The history of the country should have served as some kind of brake on the view that a swift military intervention could bring social change.

The Russians tried that in Afghanistan and it didn't work. An unnamed communist—quoted in Radek Sikorski's *Dust of the Saints: A Journey to Herat in Time of War* and cited in Rodric Braithwaite's *Afgansty*—describes, their familiar-sounding objective:

> Our program was clear: land to the peasants, food for the hungry, free education for all. We knew that the mullahs in the villages would scheme against us, so we issued our decrees swiftly so that the masses could see where their real interests lay … For the first time in Afghanistan's history, women were to be given the right to education … We told them that they owned their bodies, they could marry whom they liked, they shouldn't have to live shut up in houses like pets.

Given that history, there is debate about the kind of Afghanistan the American allies have sought to build and whether the US was too insistent on shaping democracy in its image. The Bonn agreement which established the interim administration and installed Hamid Karzai as its first chairman set the blueprint for the form of government now struggling there.

Peter Leahy believes the country's feudal, decentralised history did not necessarily make it a good candidate for American-style democracy. He says that the US has been:

> … trying to impose Madisonian democracy on people. It took the Americans a long while to get used to that [themselves], and in the American system there's almost an adversarial situation between the President and the Congress. How do you balance the power here? Well, I don't think that's working real well in Afghanistan.

John Anderson says he has wrestled for years with the notion of whether some cultures are not suited to some forms of governance. When Bush visited Australia in 2007, Anderson asked him what he thought of that proposition. 'He gave me a very interesting answer,' Anderson said. 'He said: "You know, there would have been a time when people would have said of our forebears, they are not very good candidates for democracy."'

But Anderson has his doubts about the willingness of some cultures—especially some adherents of Islam—to embrace the kind of ‘freedom’ about which Bush regularly spoke:

> I once had the opportunity to ask a very senior Arabic Islamist whether he believed the people of his country could ever really embrace democracy, and he took half an hour to say, ‘No, because we do not believe in the separation of church and state, of religion and state.’

In the wake of the uprisings of the Arab spring and the conflict in Libya, it’s interesting to note the respondent’s heritage. He was a Gaddafi.

The Australian government persistently describes the social dividends it says are emerging from the allied presence in Afghanistan. It faces a dilemma: it can’t withdraw without leaving something positive to show for all the years of fighting and all the civilian and military deaths, but it also can’t make social change a benchmark for military withdrawal.

Robert Hill acknowledges the dilemma:

> That’s why I, maybe naively, was arguing … that we need to increase the civil side. If there is to be an ultimate dividend it can’t just be supported by the military … Perhaps in Afghanistan there has been too much emphasis on the military and not enough emphasis on the civil … One thing that struck me, and it struck me more with Iraq than Afghanistan, is how little we knew about the country and the influences in the country. Sometimes I think we still don’t—‘we’ being the western world generally. [On] the tribal influences, I think, you know, ‘How ignorant could we have been?’ And I think with the benefit of hindsight we would’ve been a little more reserved about what was achievable, and perhaps the missions might’ve been structured to achieve slightly different outcomes to what has been the case.

In Afghanistan, Julia Gillard says change can't be achieved by military means alone.

> The Afghan people have to step up to shaping and building their nation … That doesn't mean we won't be there with development assistance and those kind of things. But you can't, through military forces, impose a western democracy. You need it to grow and you need the people whose democracy it will be to grow it.

But do they want to grow it? If the allied forces withdrew, would the march of development in Afghanistan continue? Would parents fight for the right to send their daughters to school? A good many people within the military establishment—and some within the political establishment, too—have their doubts.

But there are optimists. Now-retired Defence Force chief Angus Houston remains convinced lasting change is possible:

> For Afghanistan to generate sufficient human capital to do the job is a huge challenge. And where should a large part of the effort go? Education, education, education. Because if we can educate sufficient people to go in and do those jobs, it's going to be easier to achieve the outcome that is eventually required—a stable, workable Afghanistan. It's not going to be Sweden in South Asia. It's going to be something less than that. But as long as the country can work, that's what's important.

He's not the first to use the metaphor. 'We are not in Afghanistan to build the perfect democracy,' British Prime Minister David Cameron said in October 2010. 'We will never leave behind a sort of Switzerland in the Hindu Kush, but we can make that country safe from terrorist training camps, which will make us safe back here at home.'

Former Chief of Army Peter Leahy believes that aiming for a US or European-style stable democracy is unrealistic. ‘But, gee whiz,’ Leahy said, ‘with the amount of effort going in there and the number of troops, I’d be looking for black-and-white cows and people yodelling.’

*

That effort is measured in gains made against lives lost and dollars spent by the allied forces and Afghans themselves. So what are the gains? Are they worth it? And what, exactly, is the definition of success?

Gillard defines success as achieving ‘strategic denial’—something that is hard to measure—ensuring Afghanistan does not again become ‘a haven for terrorists’. ‘… Strategic denial of Afghanistan, of training in Afghanistan for terrorist forces,’ she said.

Howard identifies a fundamental problem with that ambition. ‘Life’s very complicated,’ he said. ‘I mean, you are dealing with an enemy that is prepared to sit it out, knows the psychology of our societies. And will continue to sit it out.’

The US-led allied forces have fostered development in Afghanistan. They have set up institutions of law, governance and human rights which didn’t exist before, and built roads and bridges, hospitals and schools which girls as well as boys attend. They have encouraged commerce and discouraged the drug trade, and pushed out their forward operating bases into areas they haven’t been in before—the little communities springing up around them they claim as evidence that people feel safer when they are around.

But they have killed many civilians—it’s not clear how many—installed a corrupt government and face increased aggression from insurgents. The persistence of the insurgents and their refusal to follow the normal rules of warfare means that after a decade, the gains against insurgents are officially described as ‘fragile’. In June 2011, US forces commander David Petraeus told ABC America’s Diane Sawyer: ‘We’re making progress. They’ll try to

come back though. And that's why we say that these gains, while significant, are fragile … We're really loathe to use this very loaded term of winning or losing.'

In the same joint interview, on the brink of his retirement, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates answered criticisms emerging from within the US Congress that the war was costing America US $10 billion a month. He said the cost was falling. He also addressed the issue of winning. 'We have not had a declared victory in a war—with the possible exception of the First Gulf War—since World War II. It is the phenomenon of modern conflict.

With the endorsement of the US, the Afghan government has begun peace talks with elements of the Taliban. In her February speech to the Asia Society, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton distinguished the Taliban from al Qaeda—a deliberate about-face on where the war began, when the two groups were seen as interchangeable. She was laying the groundwork for negotiations towards a political solution and issued an ultimatum. 'Break ties with al Qaeda, renounce violence, and abide by the Afghan constitution, and you can rejoin Afghan society,' Clinton said. 'Refuse and you will continue to face the consequences of being tied to al Qaeda as an enemy of the international community.'

It was part of what she called 'three surges' towards success in Afghanistan. The other two were a military offensive 'against al Qaeda terrorists and Taliban insurgents' (carefully leaving room for some Taliban to not be defined that way), and a civilian campaign to boost governments, economies and civil societies in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. It's an attempt to separate out war-weary Taliban sympathisers who have been co-opted to the cause but would rather—like the ex-Baathist soldiers in Iraq—put down their weapons and go home.

Some say this approach is the only way to a political solution, which in turn is the only way out. Others say the insurgents will see it as a sign of weakness because the Americans would only agree to peace talks if they think they aren't winning.

Alexander Downer is in the first camp. He believes they have to ‘accept that the Taliban is going to be part of the political environment—accept that and learn to find a political solution … They haven’t got any choice. There’s too much support for the Taliban to avoid that.’ He took his argument further in the pages of *The Wall Street Journal* in October 2010: ‘If we all just pack up and quit, every single one of our objectives will be lost. The jihadists, and al Qaeda in particular, will be energised by a historic victory. Nine years of war will have been wasted.’

The ANU’s William Maley is adamant that negotiating is the wrong approach. He says that would prompt locals to anticipate the future Taliban influence and act accordingly and only add to the numbers among the Hazara minority in Afghanistan fleeing to countries like Australia:

> I think the whole notion of negotiating with the Taliban is stark, staring crazy. It’s mad. It leads to hedging behaviour right through the Afghan population. And frankly no one at this stage could say with confidence if there were an agreement with the Taliban it wouldn’t result in provinces like Uruzgan and Ghazni and Helmand and Kandahar being given to them as a sphere of influence. So why are we surprised if Hazaras start arriving from Ghazni? If I was a Hazara in Ghazni, listening to all this talk about talking to the Taliban, I’d be getting out … The whole point for the Taliban of signing would be to get the American forces either completely out or more seriously just out to the point where it was no longer credible that they could be reinjected. At that point you push for the whole country. Forget about power sharing … Peace talks don’t necessarily lead to peace. They can lead to civil war.

Michael L’Estrange is pessimistic about the prospects for a political settlement with elements of the Taliban:

> I think it's got some logic to it. I don't think it's going to succeed because I don't think you can tell the good and the bad Taliban. And I don't think that the Taliban—the bad Taliban—have really reached the point where they think they're going to fail. The only reason they would sue for peace or to pursue their goals through other means would be if they thought they were going to fail … It's worth pursuing [talks] in the sense that you may be able to wean some people off. And you may be able to divide and rule somewhat … But I don't think we should be deluded that somehow this is the key to the door.

Arthur Sinodinos is sympathetic to the position US President Barack Obama—the chief protagonist—finds himself in:

> It's very hard for him to give an open-ended commitment [to stay]. And yet, the problem he's got is by giving a definitive finishing point to all of this in a sense he just encourages the other side to wait him out, which they would do anyway because it's their country, they know how to operate in it. Some of them just won't reconcile to the West. It's as simple as that.

John Howard insists the allied forces can reach their goal of denying would-be terrorists a safe haven. 'I'm optimistic enough to believe, providing the principle participants remain committed, that we can achieve that goal,' Howard said. 'But it's hard. And the longer it goes on, the more difficult it becomes.' He says the precarious nature of the country next door makes stabilising Afghanistan essential and also much more difficult.

Pakistan is now where the international focus has finally turned. Peter Cosgrove believes that is where it needs to be:

> Our people continue to do a fantastic job and I do see occasional green shoots, so to speak, in Afghanistan. What is worrying is the

> destabilisation of large sections of the national community in Afghanistan has transmitted into parts of Pakistan. And it's almost a case now that the future security of Afghanistan has to be seen through the prism of Pakistan.

Michael Thawley says Pakistan is central to everything: 'My view probably now is different from what it was because we've actually got a really big problem on the border with Pakistan.' Speaking before the killing of Osama bin Laden sparked outrage in Pakistan over breach of sovereignty, Howard was concerned at the direction relations with Pakistan had taken:

> It's a nightmare to me because it's so unstable and the terrorists—al Qaeda and their affiliates and the Taliban—seem to me to have a much greater foothold than they had … One of the things that really focuses my mind is that if Afghanistan goes, the consequences in relation to Pakistan are enormous. It's a nuclear-armed state. If that ends up as a nuclear-armed state in the hands of people who are very unsympathetic to us, well, I don't like that.

Gillard doesn't like it either:

> We're strongly engaged [with Pakistan] at a diplomatic level. We're increasingly engaged in military discussions and exchanges but, you know, I'm not going to pretend that it's easy. We've consistently pressed on Pakistan to do what it needs to do to assist with a very porous border and the moving of people and weaponry across that border, and we'll continue to do that.

Some military experts say the insurgents fighting in Afghanistan are receiving more help from the Pakistan security agencies than they were at

the beginning of the war. One described the situation as ‘like a switch got turned’. Special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ric Smith, believes the insurgent sanctuaries in Pakistan have made a difference in the wrong direction. ‘The Taliban would not be in the field in the strength that they are without those sanctuaries,’ he said.

The government is urging Pakistan to accept that the problem with the border is a problem for Pakistan itself. But the bin Laden killing has angered the Pakistani government and complicated its relationship with the US. ‘Allegations of complicity or incompetence are absurd,’ Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said after the US operation. ‘We emphatically reject such accusations … Pakistan is not the birthplace of al Qaeda. We did not invite Osama bin Laden to Pakistan or even to Afghanistan.’ Gilani said he had ‘full confidence in the high command of the Pakistan Armed Forces and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)’ and warned the US: ‘Unilateralism runs the inherent risk of serious consequences.’

On 31 May 2011, Pakistani journalist Syed Saleem Shahzad was found dead near his car in Sarai Alamgir, 150 kilometres south-east of the capital, Islamabad, after publishing the first of what were intended to be two investigative reports for Asia News Online alleging links between al Qaeda and the Pakistani military. Previously, after writing about such links, Shahzad had been arrested by the ISI and asked to write a retraction. He had refused and later told family and friends he felt threatened. Human Rights Watch accused the Pakistani ISI of being responsible for his death.

*

Ten years on from September 11, Australia is in Afghanistan deeper than ever. From the lean Special Forces deployment of 2001, its commitment has expanded to involve military and police trainers, civilian aid workers, diplomats and engineers. It is not a commitment which can be easily dismantled. The Defence Force and the Government insist they see progress

in Uruzgan province. But by 2011 the politics have become all about finding a definition of success which enabled a dignified exit while offering the least risk of Afghanistan descending into failed state territory, and the entire war appearing to have been for nought.

William Maley argues it is possible to put down the insurgency by specially targeting its key elements—the Pakistani-based militant organisations the Quetta Shura and the Haqqani network, and the former Mujahideen leader turned head of the Hezb-e-Islami militia network, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

> If you could procure the arrest of Quetta Shura, Hekmatyar and the Haqqanis, the insurgency in Afghanistan would be dead in a couple of months, not because everything would be improved but because people tend to respond to what they see as the prevailing wind direction. And this would be a decisive indication of the wind shifting. At that point, you could then turn to Karzai and read him the Riot Act over governance in a serious kind of way.

Lowy Institute director, Andrew Shearer, a former diplomat and adviser to Defence Minister Robert Hill, believes increased effort—more international and trained local troops, more money and a better development strategy—can bring success in Afghanistan. In 2008, he and Brookings Institution fellow Michael O'Hanlon outlined that argument in the Unification Church-owned *The Washington Times*: 'As many, including President Bush, belatedly realised about Iraq in 2006, we are beginning to lose in Afghanistan,' they wrote. 'The stakes are too high either to ignore this fact or to assume that any one new and modest policy initiative will suffice to turn things around.'

In 2011, Shearer still believed Australia should stick it out. He says it's a mistake to think of the commitment solely in alliance terms and that it remains in Australia's national interest:

> Crudely put, this is the sort of military operation that's the price of small-e empire. It's the price of running the sort of international system that we want to exist in and it's the sort of operation that the British army conducted right through the 19th century. And it's unpleasant and dirty and unpopular and a long way from home.

Defence Force Chief Angus Houston says the winter of early 2011 was the best of the whole war as far as Australian forces disrupting insurgents in Uruzgan province. He remains convinced they are making considerable progress and must stay. After the 6 June death of Sapper Rowan Robinson, the 27th Australian, he said:

> If we pull out immediately, we leave behind a very messy situation in the province of Uruzgan. Look, why would you pull out when you're making the best progress you've ever made? You have the Taliban completely disrupted and on the back foot. Why, why would you do it? Believe me, we need to stay the course.

*

Among those sending Australians to war, there have been changes over ten years. The government has changed from Liberal–National to Labor. Cabinet's National Security Committee now meets in a fancy new room, with video screens and other improved technology. And separately, every fortnight, the heads of all the relevant Australian agencies meet to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. To allow for a free-ranging and frank discussion, there are no note-takers. National Security Adviser Duncan Lewis convenes the meeting and around the table are the secretaries of the Defence and Foreign Affairs departments, the Chief of the Defence Force, the heads of the intelligence agencies ASIS and ONA, the head of AusAID

and Australia's special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The fortnightly meeting is designed to allow each agency, equally, to put forward its views and concerns and give an update on its work so that Defence—which has by far the largest number of staff dedicated to the operation—doesn't always dominate.

They are carefully clocking all signs of 'progress'. Every measurable, definable, spruikable example takes Australia a step closer to getting out—they hope, this time, for good. The objective is to train enough soldiers and police to maintain order, build enough roads to carry goods to market easily, educate enough children and young people to create a new generation of leaders who can dream big and govern well and to offer enough glimpses of an alternative life of economic and social development that the Afghans won't want to go back. It is a mighty task being attempted in the face of strong resistance.

The consequences of staying through to 2020—as Prime Minister Julia Gillard has foreshadowed—are now being weighed against the consequences of pulling out too fast. John Anderson described the dilemma: 'Many people I know and respect say, "What are we doing in Afghanistan? Why can't we get out?" I say, "Well, the risk of getting out [is that] if you were to mishandle getting out, then none of us are safe."'

Former Labor Defence Minister John Faulkner says the withdrawal will necessarily be slow. 'I don't think you get to one point and then X number of Australian troops all get on a C-17 and head for the hills,' he said. 'The Iraq experience is relevant here when we draw down Australian forces into an overwatch role. That's how I would see it occurring.' That means a gradual shift to just supervising Afghan troops.

But in Iraq, the insurgency weakened. In Afghanistan so far, there are fewer signs of that. Some argue the conflict has become a way of life, and the insurgency only exists because coalition forces are there to be fought. On the basis of that argument, if the forces left, it would disappear. The insurgents are fighting because the forces are there, and the forces stay because the insurgents are fighting back.

Professor Hugh White of the Australian National University's Strategic and Defence Studies Centre believes the conflict has become self-fulfilling:

> The Australian public itself seems to be rather content to accept that we're there because we're there and not to ask the question: is the terrible price that's been paid … worth what it is we're trying to achieve? And I've got to say I'm quite sceptical about that. It's not that the future of Afghanistan is not important. But whether there's any real prospect that the operations we're now undertaking … has any real prospect of turning Afghanistan into the kind of place that … offers a better life for Afghans, or for that matter reduces the risk of terrorist attack on Australia, is, I think, extremely doubtful.

Special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Ric Smith has previously called Afghanistan 'a wobbly three-legged stool'. Now he says:

> We went in for very good reason, unavoidably in 2001. The job since has been to consolidate the wins that they had then. They faltered of course … But we can't now leave unless we are prepared to live with the consequences of leaving, and they are widespread consequences. They're strategic and they go right down to the civil society we've encouraged to develop in Afghanistan which feels very vulnerable … Right through from the whole issue of Afghanistan's future and the prospects of civil war—India, Pakistan, Iran—the signals that departure would send to extremism, right through to the local situation there [could be very bad]. So the second reason, the second consequence you'd have to live with—would be a paradigm shift in the US strategic relationship … We're there in an alliance context. Are we walking away from that? Have we ever not been where they are? Now that's a debate worth having but, I always say, never while we've got big operations on. And the irony is that whenever we

> haven’t got operations on, people forget the issue. So it never does get properly scrutinised.

Debate has been discouraged to avoid any risk of returning to the atmospherics of Vietnam. But in 2011, political leaders are united on supporting the troops, if not entirely on the war itself.

It’s been ten years. Perhaps it’s time.

Acknowledgements

This is a book about military matters but not a military book. It's mostly about people and how and why they have made their decisions. Writing it was only possible because so many were willing to explain.

My great thanks go to the prime ministers, ministers, defence force chiefs, military personnel, agency heads, diplomats, officials, staff, academics and journalists—from Australia and abroad—who were prepared to trust me with their recollections and views. Some are noted. Many, at their request, are not.

Special thanks to Nicole Brangwin and Ann Rann in the Parliamentary Library for their chronology of Australia's military involvement in Afghanistan, without which this would have been immeasurably harder. Grateful thanks, too, for their infinite patience, to all at Melbourne University Press, especially Louise Adler, Sally Heath, Lily Keil and copy-editor Russ Radcliffe.

Decades ago my teacher, Elaine Jago, suggested I should write. Colleague Laurie Oakes suggested writing a book and friends Lenore Taylor and Paul Daley encouraged the idea of this one. SBS employers Mark Boyd, Paul Cutler and Shaun Brown gave me time, space and backing. My Canberra bureau colleagues absorbed the pressure. Dave Johnston, Jason Glanville and the crew of friends, Mike Bowers, Deirdre Mahoney, Fleur Earwaker, the Hatfield Dodds family and Mitch Catlin were unfailingly supportive. Andree Stephens and Sam and Grace Coelli gave me a bed, a desk and some tropical perspective. Tracy Sutherland and Michael, Ella and Neve Brissenden made me part of the family. To Susie van den Heuvel and Neil Lade, your friendship pulled me through. Your feedback on every chapter was above and beyond. Thank you.

To Wayne, Andrea, Eugenia, James, Georgia, Grace and Harry—eternal gratitude for understanding when your sister and aunt has been absent and wishing she wasn't. To my parents, Bruce and Maxine Middleton—this is by way of thanks for your immense support in this endeavour and always. For all those times when I've been in places you'd rather I had avoided—sorry. I know it's not easy. And to my late grandfather, Crawford Nalder—there is, at last, some sort of book. One way or another, you would have had a view on this war. I hope this helps other Australians form one too.

Notes

CHAPTER ONE

p. 2, *'the idle hill of summer'*: A.E. Housman, *On the Idle Hill of Summer*, 1896.

p. 3, *journalists had shouted questions*: Questions to George W. Bush and John Howard at the Rose Garden, White House, 10 September 2001, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 4, *'each recalled that it was the other'*: Peter Costello, *The Costello Memoirs*, Melbourne University Press, 2008, p. 191; John Howard, *Lazarus Rising*, HarperCollins, 2010, p. 378.

p. 4, 'A plane's just flown': confidential interviews, 2011.

p. 5, *'The Last Night at the Greatest Bar on Earth'*: Elizabeth Johnson, *The Journal News*, 12 September 2001.

p. 5, *'Could I just say'*: John Howard, news conference, Willard Hotel, Washington DC, 11 September 2001.

p. 8, *'I haven't lost anyone yet'*: John Howard, *Lazarus Rising*, 2010, p. 377.

p. 9, *'Turn on the damn TV'*: Paul Chamberlin, interview, Canberra, February 2011; John Anderson, interview, Canberra, January, 2011.

p. 10, *'There goes the election'*: Kim Beazley, interview, Washington DC, February 2011; Greg Turnbull, interview, Canberra, February 2011.

p. 11, *'There wasn't a great deal'*: John Anderson, interview, Canberra, January 2011.

p. 11, *'a terrible moment in history'*: Alexander Downer, interview, Adelaide, December 2010.

p. 12, *'It was a shocking event'*: Peter Reith, interview, Melbourne, December 2010.

p. 12, *'It was the clearest line':* John Anderson, interview, Canberra, January 2010.

p. 12, *'We canvassed the possibility'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.

p. 12, *'It was a dreadful week':* John Anderson, interview, Canberra, January 2010.

p. 14, *'I think she could've handled that'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.

p. 16, *'I think it is true'*: ibid.

p. 17, *'Dear Mr President'*: letter from John Howard to George W. Bush, 11 September 2001.

p. 18, *'terrible vengeance'*: Alexander Downer, interview, Adelaide, December 2010.

CHAPTER TWO

p. 19, *'what's he doing here?'*: Arthur Sinodinos, interview, Sydney, December 2010.

p. 20, *'Mr Anderson, what does this mean?':* Laurie Oakes, telephone interview, March 2011; John Anderson, interview, Canberra, January 2011.

p. 21, *'a bit pro-forma'*: Arthur Sinodinos, interview, Sydney, December 2010.

p. 23, *'We have to be very careful'*: Chris Barrie, interviews, Canberra, October 2010 and April 2011.
p. 24, *'all Australians, are profoundly shocked'*: Alexander Downer, doorstop interview, Adelaide, 12 September 2001.
p. 24, *'surprisingly emotional'*: Alexander Downer, interview, Adelaide, December 2010.
p. 26, *'It may seem peculiar'*: Michael Thawley, interview, Los Angeles, February 2011.
p. 27, *'Oh God, come to our assistance'*: prayer by Reverend Daniel Coughlin to open the US House of Representatives, US Congressional record, 12 September 2001.
p. 27, *'The Chair wishes to acknowledge'*: Dennis Hastert, US Congressional record, 12 September 2011.
p. 28, *the man on the stairs*: Michael Mastrian, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.
p. 28, *'Nation will not take up sword'*: Micah 4:3, order of service, National Cathedral, Washington DC, 12 September 2001.
p. 28, *'Love your enemies'*: Matthew 5:44, order of service. National Cathedral, Washington DC, 12 September 2001.
p. 29, *'We haven't been requested'*: John Howard, news conference, Australian Ambassador's residence, Washington DC, 12 September 2001.
p. 29, *'There are occasions'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.
p. 29, *'I didn't criticise'*: John Howard, news conference, Australian ambassador's residence, Washington DC, 12 September 2001.
p. 29, *'That news conference'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.
p. 30, *Armitage outlined his views*: Richard Armitage, interview, February 2011; John Howard, interview, March 2011.
p. 30, *call in the Pakistani ambassador*: 9/11 Commission Report, 2004, p. 331, s. 10.2.
p. 31. *'There was no need to'*: Richard Armitage, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.
p. 31, *'Pakistan would be made to choose'*: John Howard, *Lazarus Rising*, HarperCollins, 2010, p. 385.
p. 31, *rang the White House*: Michael Thawley, interview, February 2011.
p. 32, *'what do you think of invoking ANZUS?'*: John Howard, interview, March 2011.
p. 32, *'This bell is a reminder'*: address by George W. Bush at the ANZUS 50th anniversary ceremony, Washington Navy Yard, 10 September 2001.

CHAPTER THREE

p. 35, *'we needed to be aware':* John Anderson, interview, Canberra, January 2011.
p. 36, *'while they wanted the support'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.
p. 36, *'The decision is based'*: John Howard, news conference, Parliament House, 14 September 2001.
p. 36, *'We thought it ought to be done'*: Kim Beazley, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.
p. 37, *'They were very keen'*: Chris Barrie, interview, Canberra, April 2011.
p. 37, *'It's like leaving something'*: Peter Cosgrove, interview, Sydney, January 2011.
p. 37, *'America was very traumatised'*: Chris Barrie, interview, Canberra, April 2011.
p. 38, *'I was conscious'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.

p. 39, *Operation Desert Thunder*, www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/desert_thunder.htm

p. 39, *Operation Desert Fox*, www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/desert_fox.htm

p. 39, *'The Aussies, the French, the Canadians'*: Bob Woodward, *Bush At War*, Simon & Schuster, 2002, pp. p179–180

p. 40, *'Dick, we do not have room'*: Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, Simon & Schuster, 2004, p. 61.

p. 40, *Rumsfeld acknowledged Australia's request*: Bob Woodward, *Bush At War*, Simon & Schuster, 2002, p. 179.

p. 40, *'the old solicitor's training'*: John Howard, interview, March 2011.

p. 40, *without a request*: Glen Barclay, 'The Light that Failed—Australia and the Vietnam War', History Today, vol. 38, February 1988.

p. 40, *In Parliament, he flourished a letter*: Robert Menzies, Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, Hansard, first session of the twenty-fifth parliament (third period, 16 March–26 May 1965), 29 April 1965, vol. 17 1965, p. 1061.

p. 41, *'They don't want to request'*: Peter Reith, diary note, 5 October 2001.

p. 42, *'If you're going into battle'*: Peter Reith, interview, Melbourne, December 2010.

p. 42, *'John, our two militaries'*: George W. Bush, confidential interview, 2011.

p. 42, *'those who are lost'*: Alexander Downer, speech to commemorative service, New York, 28 September 2001.

p. 43, *'perpetrators, organisers and sponsors'*: UN Security Council resolution 1368, 12 September 2001.

p. 43, *the Security Council went further*: UN Security Council resolution 1373, 28 September 2001.

p. 44, *'The actions that took place'*: Duncan Lewis, interview, March 2011.

p. 45, *'Doesn't General Cosgrove know'*: Ken Gillespie, interview, Canberra, April 2011.

p. 45, *'I want you to be'*: Andrew Nikolic and Ken Gillespie, interviews, Canberra, January 2011.

p. 45, *'this is what I'm planning'*: Andrew Nikolic, interview, Canberra, January 2011.

p. 46, *he sat on the plane*: Ken Gillespie, interview, Canberra, April 2011.

p. 46, *'There was definitely a discussion'*: Peter Reith, interview, Melbourne, December 2010.

p. 46, *'There was a number'*: Peter Cosgrove, interview, Sydney, January 2011.

p. 47, *government was in good shape*: confidential interviews, 2010–2011.

p. 47, *'When President Bush and I spoke'*: John Howard, news conference, Parliament House, Canberra, 4 October 2001.

p. 47, *described the commitment as 'modest'*: Kim Beazley, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.

p. 48, *'Quite frankly, the last thing'*: John Howard, news conference, Parliament House, Canberra, 4 October 2001.

p. 48, *'the Americans want you there'*: Michael Thawley, interview, Los Angeles, March, 2011.

p. 49, *'It all seemed to be coming along'*: Angus Houston, interview, Canberra, April 2011.

p. 49, *'They were very gracious'*: ibid.

p. 49, *'the belligerence'*: Peter Cosgrove, interview, Sydney, January 2011.

p. 51, *'Blood cannot be cleansed'*: Mark Bowling, PM, ABC Radio, 15 October 2001.

p. 51, *Rumsfeld's Rules*: Donald Rumsfeld, *Wall Street Journal*, 29 January 2001.

CHAPTER FOUR

p. 52, *'As you go further'*: former SAS soldier, interview, Perth, December 2010.

p. 52, *'We were stuck'*: former SAS soldier, interview, Perth, December 2010.

p. 53, *to better reflect the terrain*: former SAS soldiers, interview, Perth, December 2010; confidential interview, Canberra, 2011.

p. 54, *codenamed Jawbreaker*: John Coates, *Atlas of Australia's Wars*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 380.

54, *'These carefully targeted actions'*: George W. Bush in a text of address to the nation, 7 October 2001, as reported by *New York Times*, 8 October 2001.

p. 55, *'Here is America struck by God Almighty'*: English translation of a recorded message by Osama bin Laden, broadcast on al Jazeera, 7 October 2001; translation from *New York Times*, 8 October 2001.

p. 56, *To stiffen the resolve of the local fighters*: John Coates, *An Atlas of Australia's Wars*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 380.

p. 56, *'A couple of attempts'*: Ken Gillespie, interview, Canberra, April 2011.

p. 58, *Eight days later*: Gus Gilmore, telephone interview, April 2011.

p. 58, *'in the middle of nowhere'*: Duncan Lewis, interview, Canberra, 30 March 2011.

p. 59, *'It looked like Mars'*: Gus Gilmore, notebook entry, December 2001.

p. 59, *'drug...proceeds…now being used to fund terrorism'*: Duncan Lewis, Australian Defence Force briefing, December 10 2002, www.defence.gov.au/media/2002/73002.doc

p. 59, *'patrolling around the outside'*: Duncan Lewis, interview, Canberra, March 2011.

p. 59, *'We have insisted on this'*: Duncan Lewis, media briefing, Defence headquarters, Canberra, 12 October 2002.

p. 59, *'guys who slap women'*: Ed O'Keefe, 'It's fun to shoot some people', *Washington Post*, 9 July 2010.

p. 59, *'If we'd had to borrow vehicles'*: Gus Gilmore, telephone interview, April 2011.

p. 60, *'reach over our shoulder'*: Peter Cosgrove, interview, Sydney, January 2011.

p. 60, *'invented darkness'*: Major General Franklin L. Hagenback, interviewed in Robert H. McElroy with Patrecia Slayden Hollis, 'Afghanistan: Fire Support for Operation Anaconda', *Field Artillery*, Sep–Oct 2002.

p. 60, *'There were guns bristling'*: Gus Gilmore, telephone interview, April 2011.

p. 60, *some goat repellent'*: confidential interview, 2011.

p. 62, *'an amazing meeting'*: Duncan Lewis, interview, Canberra, March 2011.

p. 62, *'I was surprised by Karzai'*: Gus Gilmore, telephone interview, April 2011.

p. 63, *their aim was to stay undetected*: Ian McPhedran, *Soldiers Without Borders*, HarperCollins, 2008, p. 287.

p. 63, *Were there unmarked land mines?*: former SAS soldiers, interview, Perth, December 2010.

p. 63, *'They just see us'*: ibid.

p. 64, *grudges borne down the generations*: David Lloyn, *In Afghanistan: Two Hundred Years of British, Russian and American Occupation*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 72.

p. 64, *'If they're robbed'*: Andrew Nikolic, interview, Canberra, January 2011.

p. 64, *Corporal Tristan Salvadori*: John Coates, *An Atlas of Australia's Wars*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 382.

p. 65, *At 12.45 pm*: confidential interview, 2010; Department of Defence, 'Biography of Sergeant Russell, www.defence.gov.au/vale/sgt_russell/sgt_russell.htm

p. 66, *'armour all over it'*: Peter Cosgrove, interview, Sydney, January 2011.

p. 66, *souvenired a turban*: Brendan Nicholson, 'Probe reopened over SAS killing of Afghans', *Age*, 2 June 2005.

p. 66, *committed suicide*: Ean Higgins, 'Botched mission "led to soldier's suicide"', *Australian*, 21 April 2007.

p. 66, *Several years of peacekeeping in East Timor*: confidential interviews, 2010–2011.

p. 67, *'He was a man'*: John Anderson, interview, Canberra, January 2011.

p. 67, *'If you walk away'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.

CHAPTER FIVE

p. 68, *On 5 October*: confidential interview, December 2010.

p. 69, *'I was totally supportive'*: Peter Costello, interview, Melbourne, April 2011.

p. 69, *'I was in favour'*: ibid.

p. 70, *'They didn't screen suitcases'*: ibid.

p. 70, *'not possible to quantify the fiscal risk'*: Department of Treasury, Pre-Election and Economic Fiscal Outlook 2001, 17 October 2001, p. 28.

p. 70, *'Surely you can't'*: questions to Peter Costello and John Fahey at a news conference, Treasury Place, Melbourne, 17 October 2001.

p. 70, *'these are the best figures'*: Peter Costello, joint news conference with John Fahey, Treasury Place, Melbourne, 17 October 2001.

p. 70, *'Oh, I'm sure I did'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.

p. 71, *'a stitch in time'*: Arthur Sinodinos, interview, Sydney, December 2011.

p. 71, *'hold them accountable'*: Peter Costello, interview, Melbourne, April 2011.

p. 71, *'They came up'*: ibid.

p. 72, *'After 12 Budgets'*: ibid.

p. 73, *'I don't mind who knows'*: John Howard, interview, March 2011.

p. 73, *The Defence White Paper...2000*: Commonwealth of Australia, Defence White Paper 2000, p. 6, s. 1.15, www.defence.gov.au/publications/wpaper2000.pdf

p. 73, *highly selective*: Graeme Cheesman, 'The Howard Government's Defence White Paper: Policy, Process and Politics', *The Drawing Board: An Australian Review of Public Affairs*, vol. 2, no. 1, July 2001.

p. 73,*'deputy sheriff' to the US*: Fred Brenchley, 'The Howard Defence doctrine', *Bulletin*, 28 September 1999.

p. 74, *Lyall Howard had kept a diary*: Roy Masters, 'A family meeting against all odds', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 April 2004.

p. 74, *'it is hard to assess where to stop'*: Peter Costello, *The Costello Memoirs*, Melbourne University Press, 2008, p. 195.

p. 75, *'Budgets are not unlimited'*: Peter Costello, interview, Melbourne April 2011.
p. 76, *'It had a marked impact'*: Arthur Sinodinos, interview, Sydney, December 2011.
p. 77, *'the odd kamikaze bomber'*: Nick Minchin, interview, Canberra, November 2010.

CHAPTER SIX

p. 78, *In December 2001*: Philip Smucker, 'How bin Laden got away', *Christian Science Monitor*, 4 March 2002.
p. 79, *negotiated a truce*: Peter Bergen, *The Longest War*, Simon & Schuster, 2011, p. 77.
79, *failure to capture bin Laden*: Peter Bergen, 'The Battle for Tora Bora: How Osama bin Laden Slipped From Our Grasp—The Definitive Account', *New Republic*, 22 December 2009.
p. 80, *'They rarely needed anything'*: Sean Naylor, *Not A Good Day To Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda*, Berkley Caliber, 2005, p. 158.
p. 80, *'The operational area was rugged and exposed'*: Brigadier Paul Retter, transcripts of briefings on Operation Anaconda, Department of Defence, 8 March 2002; 15 March 2002.
p. 80, *beaten the Russians twice*: Major General Franklin L. Hagenback, interviewed in Robert H. McElroy with Patrecia Slayden Hollis, 'Afghanistan: Fire Support for Operation Anaconda', *Field Artillery*, Sep–Oct 2002.
p. 81, *Signalman Martin 'Jock' Wallace*: Sandra Lee, *18 Hours: The True Story of an SAS War Hero*, HarperCollins, pp. 3–4.
p. 81, *'the most substantial firefight'*: Duncan Lewis, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 82, *'I have great admiration'*: Ken Gillespie, interview, Canberra, April 2011.
p. 82, *On the allies' side*: globalsecurity.org/military/ops/oef-anaconda (Note: seven Americans died at Takur Ghar, eight total)
p. 82, *significant enemy commanders had got away*: Mary Jacoby, 'Seymour Hersh's alternative history of Bush's war', Salon.com, 18 September 2004.
p. 82, *'They didn't win the war':* Ken Gillespie, interview, Canberra, April 2011.
p. 82, *'Australia has always been'*: Richard Armitage, interview, Washington DC, March 2011.
p. 83, *'a fierce argument'*: Kim Beazley, 'Operation Sandglass: Old History, Contemporary Lessons', *Security Challenges*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2008, p. 29.
p. 83 *'You remember that conversation'*: Richard Armitage, interview, Washington DC, March 2011.
p. 83, *'Four OED'*: Richard Armitage, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.
p. 84, *'My view was'*: Robert Hill, interview, Adelaide, January 2011.
p. 85, *'that's what I should say'*: ibid.
p. 85, *'None of us have a time limit'*: Robert Hill, press conference, Australian High Commission, London, 15 January 2002.
p. 85, *'Some people are thinking'*: ibid.
p. 86, *'I don't think you should go'*: Philip Ruddock, interview, Sydney, January 2011; John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.
p. 87, *The UN had hosted a meeting*: letter to United Nations Security Council and text of Bonn Agreement, 5 December 2001, www.un.org

p. 87, *'apparently under US pressure'*: Dr Ravi Tomar, 'Afghanistan: a Year After', Australian Parliamentary Library, *Current Issues Brief*, no. 7, 2002–03.

p. 87, *'He spoke English'*: Arthur Sinodinos, interview, Sydney, December 2010.

p. 87, *'he was impressive'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.

p. 88, *Britain in the lead*: Reyko Huang, 'International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan', Centre for Defense Information, Washington DC, http://www.cdi.org/terrorism/isaf.cfm

p. 88, *'They were rotating it'*: Robert Hill, interview, Adelaide, January 2011.

p. 89, *Afghan asylum seekers were offered $2000*: Andrew Geoghanm 'Government offers Afghans $2,000 to return home', Lateline, ABC Television, 23 May 2002.

p. 89, *'That is a very generous offer'*: ibid.

p. 90, *'An intelligence assessment I prepared'*: Andrew Wilkie, *All Quiet in the Ranks—An Exploration of Dissent in Australia's Intelligence Agencies*, The Australia Institute, November, 2006, p. 19.

p. 90, *'I think the focus of it'*: Andrew Wilkie, interview, Canberra, March 2011.

p. 90, *'the sense of accountability to ministers'*: Philip Flood, 'Report of the Inquiry into Australia's Intelligence Agencies', Commonwealth of Australia, 20 July 2004, p. 57.

p. 91, *'Far from emerging'*: 'All our hopes are crushed: Violence and repression in Western Afghanistan', *Human Rights Watch*, 5 November 2002, p. 4.

p. 91, *'It's sort of easy'*: Peter Cosgrove, interview, Sydney, January 2011.

p. 92, *'As best you ever can'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.

p. 92, *Howard paid tribute*: John Howard, address to joint meeting of United States Congress, 12 June 2002, Congressional Record 107th Congress (2001–2002), H3456.

CHAPTER SEVEN

p. 95, *'the last vestiges of Australian innocence'*: John Howard, *Lazarus Rising*, HarperCollins, 2010, p. 411.

p. 95, *'If Australians perceived that the ADF was cringing'*: ibid., p. 357.

p. 95, *'Perth-based businessman Kerry Stokes'*: 'Emergency airlift brings the wounded home', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 October 2002.

p. 96, *'a failure of intelligence'*: John Howard, *Lazarus Rising*, HarperCollins, 2010, p. 411.

p. 96, *nobody had ever heard of them*: confidential interviews, 2011.

96, *Cabinet had been briefed*: confidential interview, 2011.

p. 97, *trained with militants*: confidential interview, 2011.

p. 97, *Andrew Ibrahim Wenham*: confidential interview, 2011; Sally Neighbour, 'ASIO tailed ex-JI man "for years"', *Australian*, 5 November 2010.

p. 97, *'should have known'*: Philip Flood, 'Report of the Inquiry into Australia's Intelligence Agencies', Commonwealth of Australia, 20 July 2004, chapter 8.

p. 98, *'We've seen Osama'*: Daryl Williams, news conference, Tangney electorate office, Perth, 12 October 2002.

p. 98, *ASIO had raised the threat level*: Philip Flood, 'Report of the Inquiry into Australia's Intelligence Agencies', Commonwealth of Australia, 20 July 2004, p. 40.

p. 99, Howard acknowledged in Parliament: John Howard, Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, Hansard, 16 October 2002, vol. 14 2002, p. 7729.

p. 99, *They should have warned us*: Mark Riley, Tom Allard, Marian Wilkinson, 'Why didn't they tell us what they knew?', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 October 2002.

p. 99, *The Prime Minister intervened*: confidential interviews, 2011.

p. 100, *'the terrorists win'*: John Howard, news conference, Sydney, 27 December 2002.

p. 99, *a $15 million national awareness campaign*: Linda Morris, 'Be alert, not alarmed—grins replace guns on anti-terrorism ad', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 December 2002.

p. 100, *stupid security measure*: Sue Lowe, 'Terrorism kit so dumb it's a winner', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 April 2003.

p. 100, *Nine years on*: confidential interview, 2011.

p. 101, *in an anonymous phone call*: Philip Flood, 'Report of the Inquiry into Australia's Intelligence Agencies', Commonwealth of Australia, 20 July 2004, pp. 78–9.

p. 101, *'a political strategy'*: Nick Minchin, interview, Canberra, November 2010.

p. 101, *'So what does that say':* Richard Armitage, interviewed by Maxine McKew, 7.30 Report, ABC Television, 17 October 2002.

p. 102, *'To my recollection'*: John Howard, news conference, Bali, 18 October 2002, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 102, *labelled Australians 'crusaders'*: BBC News, 'Bin Laden rails against crusaders and UN', BBC Monitoring translation, 3 November 2001.

p. 102, *'the British and Australians'*: BBC News, 'Bin Laden's message', BBC Monitoring translation, 12 November 2002.

p. 103, *'But why be distracted':* Richard Armitage, interviewed by Maxine McKew, 7.30 Report, ABC Television, 17 October 2002.

CHAPTER EIGHT

p. 104, *'no fait accompli'*: Philip Ruddock, interview, Sydney, January 2011.

p. 105, *'From my observations'*: Robert Hill, interview, Adelaide, January 2011.

p. 105, *the attacks presented 'an opportunity'*: Bob Woodward, *Bush At War*, Simon & Schuster, 2002, p. 49.

p. 105, *'the ballistic missile threat'*: Report of the Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States, 1998.

p. 105, *put his name to a letter*: letter to President William J. Clinton from the Project for the New American Century, 26 January 1998.

p. 105, *at a Camp David*: Bob Woodward, *Bush At War*, Simon & Schuster, 2002, pp. 83–85.

p. 106, *'It wasn't so much'*: Michael Thawley, interview, Los Angeles, February 2011.

p. 107, *At the Queensland Liberal Council*: confidential interviews,2011.

p. 107, *‘There is no advance’*: John Howard, news conference, Washington DC, 9 June 2002, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 107, *shouldn’t be making assumptions*: confidential interviews, 2010–2011.

p. 108, *‘Can I simply say’*: John Howard, speech toasting US President George W. Bush, White House, Washington DC, 10 June 2002.

p. 108, *‘a great friend in Australia’*: George W. Bush, Oval Office remarks, 13 June 2002.

p. 109, *‘It would have been odd’*: Bob Woodward, *Bush At War*, Simon & Schuster, 2002, p. 39.

p. 109, *‘something rather poignant’*: John Howard, Oval Office remarks, 13 June 2002.

p. 109, *‘We are in there with you’*: ibid.

p. 110, *‘Clearly, Iraq’s behaviour’*: John Howard answering questions, Oval Office, 13 June 2002.

p. 110, *‘there are no war plans’*: George W. Bush answering questions, Oval Office, 13 June 2002.

p. 110, *‘serious consequences’*: UN Security Council resolution 1441, 11 August 2002.

p. 111, *‘dirty and dangerous work’*: Richard Armitage, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.

p. 111, *‘We all had hugs’*: Ken Gillespie, interview, Canberra, April 2011.

p. 112, *‘keeping our big ears flapping’*: Peter Cosgrove, interview, Sydney, January 2011.

p. 112, *differing views*: confidential interviews, 2010–2011.

p. 112, *Hill went to London*: Robert Hill, interview, Adelaide, April 2011.

p. 113, *‘SAS were on that list’*: Peter Cosgrove, interview, Sydney, January 2011.

p. 114, *‘The hardest stuff’*: Alexander Downer, interview, Adelaide, December 2010.

p. 114, *‘If we’d said’*: Maurie McNarn, interview, Canberra, May 2011.

p. 115, *‘However long your deployment’*: Peta Donald, ‘Last official farewell to troops’, PM program, ABC Radio, 14 February 2003.

p. 115, *‘I sent a little note’*: Peter Cosgrove, interview, Sydney, January 2011.

p. 116, *‘Hill told me’*: Robert Hill, telephone interview, April 2011.

p. 116, *he had also secured*: Maurie McNarn, interview, Canberra, May 2011.

p. 116, *‘the smoking gun’*: Condoleezza Rice, interviweed by Wolf Blitzer, CNN, 8 September 2002.

p. 117, *‘a very, very rare opportunity’*: Liz Jackson, ‘Spinning the tubes’, Four Corners, ABC Television, 27 October 2003.

p. 117, *Downer also mentioned them*: Alexander Downer, speech to Parliament, 17 September 2002.

p. 118, *‘It remains the wish’*: John Howard, news conference, Washington DC, 9 February 2003, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 118, *‘I understand why’:* George W. Bush answering questions, Oval Office, 10 February 2003.

p. 120, *‘I’m not telling the politicians’:* AP/AAP, ‘Howard lays it on the line to UN chief’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 February 2003.

p. 120, *‘discuss the sport of rugby’*: Tony Blair, remarks at 10 Downing Street, 13 February 2003, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 120, *‘what price control in North Korea?’*: John Howard, remarks at 10 Downing Street, 13 February 2003, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

121, *‘It’s hardly a demonstration’*: John Howard, news conference, Jakarta, 15 February 2003, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 121, *‘a warmonger’*: John Howard, ‘Why we took on Saddam’s Iraq’, *Australian*, 25 October 2010.

p. 121, *'I was explaining to him'*: Alexander Downer, interview, Adelaide, December 2010.
p. 122, *'The UN process has bogged down'*: John Howard,'Why we took on Saddam's Iraq', *Australian*, 25 October 2010.
p. 122, *'hard and bitter'*: ibid.
p. 122, *Howard took a call from Bush*: Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, Simon & Schuster, 2004, pp. 362–3
p. 123, *'It was my habit'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.
p. 124, *'Australian troops will fight'*: Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, Simon & Schuster, 2004, p. 368.
p. 124, *Australian commandos*: ibid, p. 382.
p. 124, *'I had a practical problem'*: Richard Armitage, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.
p. 125, *'I'm just reading'*: Maurie McNarn, interview, Canberra, May 2011.
p. 125, *'He played it brilliantly'*: ibid.
p. 126 *'the most controversial'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.

CHAPTER NINE

p. 127, *David Hicks had been captured*: Andy Worthington, *The Guantanamo Files: The Stories of the 774 Detainees in America's Illegal Prison*, Pluto Press, 2007, p. 109.
p. 128, *Egyptian-born Mamdouh Habib*: ibid, p. 218.
p. 128, *Classified US Government prisoner profiles*: US Government Profile of Mamdouh Habib, Guantanamo Bay, 6 August 2004, WikiLeaks, 24 April 2011, www.wikileaks.org
p. 129, *'We don't have any understanding'*: John Howard, news conference, Canberra, 29 September 2003.
p. 129, *'If I had asked'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.
p. 120, *'That was incredibly complicated'*: John Anderson, interview, Canberra, January 2011.
p. 131 *'If they had a basis'*: Philip Ruddock, interview, Sydney, January 2011.
p. 131, *'This is the first time'*: Mamdouh Habib, telephone interview, April 2011.
p. 132, *'some presents for my kids'*: ibid.
p. 133, *'like a two-bedroom house'*: ibid.
p. 133, *Habib took legal action*: Dylan Welch, 'Secret sum settles Habib torture compensation case', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 January 2011.
p. 133, *'At no stage'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.
p. 134, *beaten while blindfolded*: Cameron Stewart, 'On the torture trail', *Australian*, 28 September 2007.
p. 134, *'the most highly trained white person'*: confidential interview, March 2011.
p. 135, *'no country is free from risk'*: 'no country is free from risk', John Howard, official statement, 14 March 2004, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo
p. 135, *'The reality is'*: Mick Keelty, interviewed by Jana Wendt, Sunday, Nine Network, 14 March 2004.
p. 136, *'The fact that we are in close alliance'*: Nick Squires, 'Terrorist threat worries Australia', *Telegraph*, United Kingdom, 14 August 2003.

p. 136, *'It wasn't a matter of issuing instructions'*: Arthur Sinodinos, interview, Sydney, December 2010.

p. 136, '*Well the answer'*: John Howard, news conference, Adelaide, 15 March 2004, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 137, *'I think it's very important'*: Brendan Nicholson and Tony Parkinson, 'Keelty "clarifies" terror fears', *Age*, 17 March 2004.

p. 137, *'I think it's a lot more'*: Hamish Robertson, The World Today, ABC Radio, 17 March 2004.

p. 138, *'He's just expressing'*: Alexander Downer, doorstop interview, Canberra, 16 March 2003, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 138, *'I generally agree with Mick'*: Peter Cosgrove, doorstop interview, Sydney, 16 March 2004, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 138, *'Some people took the view'*: Peter Cosgrove, *My Story*, HarperCollins, 2006, p. 401.

p. 138, *'Some time later'*: confidential interview, 2011.

CHAPTER TEN

139, *'As I speak'*: Simon Crean, National Press Club address, 20 March 2003, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 140, '*If the 21st century'*: ibid.

p. 140, *'We would be foolish':* Tony Abbott, speech to House of Representatives, 18 March 2003.

p. 141, '*Well, this is a sad day'*: Simon Crean, National Press Club address, 20 March 2003.

p. 141, *'In the Battle of Iraq'*: George W. Bush, speech on board USS Abraham Lincoln, CNN United States, 1 May 2003.

p. 141, *'a man of steel'*: George W. Bush, joint news conference with John Howard, Texas, 3 May 2003, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 142, *'Can we be sure':* Tony Blair, address to meeting of the United States Congress, 17 July 2003, Congressional Record 108th Congress (2003–2004), H7060.

p. 142, *'Let us say one thing'*: ibid.

p. 143, *'Mr Bush. This is Australia.'*: Bob Brown, interjection during address to joint sitting, House of Representatives, Australian Parliament, 23 October 2003.

p. 144, *'But we are not a sheriff!'*: ibid.

p. 144, *'I love free speech':* George W. Bush, response to interjection, House of Representatives, Australian Parliament, 23 October 2003.

p. 144, *On 27 November 2003*: Emma Griffiths, 'Lobbying begins for Labor leadership crown', Lateline, ABC Television, 28 November 2003.

p. 144, *'a taxi driver's arm'*: Linda Morris, 'Cabbie forgives his fare, but wife does not forget', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 December 2003.

p. 144, *'the most incompetent president'*: Mark Latham, Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, Hansard, 5 February 2003, vol. 1 2003, p. 10926.

p. 144, *an 'arselicker'*: Maxine McKew, *Bulletin*, 26 June 2002; *Age*, 'I'll call PM an arselicker again: Latham', 26 June 2002.

p. 145, *'the flag of a foreign country'*: John Howard, news conference, Australian High Commission, Abuja, 4 December 2003, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 146, *'We are looking to the future'*: Mark Latham, joint news conference with Kevin Rudd, Parliament House, Canberra, 4 December 2003, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 146, *'that is just pathetic'*: John Howard, news conference, Australian High Commission, Abuja, 4 December 2003.

p. 146, *'it's a term of embrace'*: Kevin Rudd, joint news conference with Mark Latham, Parliament House, Canberra, 4 December 2003, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 147, *'I wrote a letter'*: Mahmoud Saikal, interviewed by Ross Solly, AM, ABC Radio, 22 December 2003.

p. 147, *Rudd invited a colleague*: Alan Griffin, telephone interview, March 2010.

p. 147, *Rudd thought this was not a good idea*: confidential interviews, 2011.

p. 147, *'Front and centre'*: Kevin Rudd, interviewed by Mark Colvin, AM, ABC Radio, 19 March 2004.

148, *a call from Latham*: confidential interviews, 2011.

p. 148, *'back by Christmas'*: Mark Latham, interviewed by Mike Carlton, 2UE, 23 March 2004.

p. 148, *missing his family*: Mark Latham, *The Latham Diaries*, Melbourne University Press, 2005, p. 276.

p. 148, *'So I overruled him'*: ibid.

p. 148, *Latham set a trap*: ibid., p. 280.

p. 149, *'We've been discussing it'*: Kevin Rudd, interviewed by Tony Jones, Lateline, ABC Television, 29 March 2004.

p. 150, *'I will never forget'*: George W. Bush, joint news conference with John Howard, White House, Washington DC, 3 June 2004, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 150, *'You reminded me'*: John Howard, joint news conference with George W. Bush, White House, Washington DC. 3 June 2004, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 150, *'In recent weeks'*: ibid.

p. 151, *'Where are you?'*: George W. Bush, remarks at joint news conference with John Howard, Rose Garden, White House, Washington DC, 3 June 2004.

p. 151, *'Just here, thank you'*: Steve Lewis, remarks at joint news conference between George W. Bush and John Howard, Rose Garden, White House, Washington DC, 3 June 2004.

p. 151, *'I think that would be disastrous'*: George W. Bush, ibid.

p. 151, *Some, including Latham*: Mark Latham, *The Latham Diaries*, Melbourne University Press 2005, p. 293.

p. 152, *'15 all'*: ibid.

p. 152, *'When I said I was anti-Establishment'*: ibid., p. 294.

p. 152, *'the official notes'*: questions to John Howard at a news conference, Campbell Barracks, Swanbourne, 9 June 2004.

p. 152, *Jeffery had referred*: Michael Jeffery, speech at the presentation of Unit Citation for Gallantry, Campbell Barracks, Swanbourne, 9 June 2004. (Note: reference does not appear in official transcript. Mentioned in John Howard's news conference, Campbell Barracks, Swanbourne, 9 June 2004, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo)

p. 152, *'interfere in domestic politics'*: John Howard, news conference, Campbell Barracks, Swanbourne, 9 June 2004.
p. 153, *You can't sit around*: Kim Beazley, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.
p. 154, *'Our opponents in the war'*: Mark Latham, speech to Australian Institute of International Affairs, Sydney, 12 July 2004.
p. 155, *'This election will be about trust'*: John Howard, news conference, Parliament House, Canberra, 29 August 2004.
p. 155, *'people don't trust this government'*: Mark Latham, news conference, Sydney, 29 August 2004.
p. 155, *a bomb exploded*: Simon Jeffery, Mark Oliver and agencies, 'Australian embassy bomb kills nine', *Guardian*, 9 September 2004.
p. 155, *'utter dismay'*: John Howard, news conference, Melbourne, 9 September 2004.
p. 155, *'the day any country surrenders'*: Steve Lewis and Sid Maher, 'Leaders defer campaign, but debate still on', *Australian*, 10 September 2004; Mark Metherell, Cynthia Banham and Penelope Debelle, 'Bombers will not sway us', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 September 2004.
p. 155, *'deal with the consequences'*: Mark Latham, news conference, Cairns, 9 September 2004.
p. 156, *Journalist Samantha Maiden*: Dennis Shanahan, 'Gloves off, this is personal', *Australian*, 20 September 2004.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

p. 158, *'The Howard government'*: Kim Beazley, speech to Australian Institute of International Affairs, Canberra, 26 May 2004.
p. 158, *'Whatever the argument'*: ibid.
p. 159, *'Believe me'*: Alexander Downer, interview, Adelaide, December 2010.
p. 159, *'We needed some help'*: Richard Armitage, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.
p. 159, *Iraq would be a 'cakewalk'*: Kenneth Adelman, 'Cakewalk in Iraq', *Washington Post*, 13 February 2002; Kenneth Adelman, 'Cakewalk, revisited', *Washington Post*, 10 April 2003.
p. 160, *'I did have a conversation'*: Richard Armitage, interview, Washington DC, February, 2011.
p. 160, *'It was becoming clear'*: Andrew Shearer, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 160, *'Word came through'*: Michael L'Estrange, interview, Canberra, January 2011.
p. 161, *'We went in'*: Robert Hill, interview, Adelaide, April 2011.
161, *The Special Forces command*: confidential interviews, 2011.
p. 161, *Australia should be sending soldiers*: confidential interviews, 2010–2011; John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.
p. 161, *'the appropriate operation'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.
p. 162, *'Australia went back'*: Peter Cosgrove, interview, Sydney, January 2011.
p. 162, *cost implications*: Nicole Brangwin with Ann Rann, 'Australia's military involvement in Afghanistan since 2001: a chronology', Australian Parliamentary Library, 16 July 2010, Appendix I.
p. 162, *he told others*: confidential interviews, 2011.
p. 163, *Cosgrove oversaw preparation*: confidential interviews, 2011.

p. 163, *Houston had a different view*: confidential interviews, 2011.

163, *consider Bamiyan province*: Ric Smith, interview, Canberra, March 2011.

p. 163, *dispatched to Fort Bragg*: Tim McOwan, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.

p. 164, *covert operations in Pakistan*: Anne Patterson in a secret cable from the US Embassy, Islamabad, to State Department, Washington DC, 9 October 2009. WikiLeaks, 20 May 2011, www.wikileaks.org

p. 164, *The Cabinet submission*: confidential interview, 2011.

164, *'The Americans were trying'*: Peter Leahy, interview, Canberra, April 2011.

p. 165, *'Did you discuss'*: questions to John Howard at a news conference, Parliament House, Canberra, 13 July 2005.

p. 165, *'The answer is no'*: John Howard, news conference, Parliament House, Canberra, 13 July 2005, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 165, *'a perfect democracy'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.

p. 165, *'it would be overstating it'*: ibid.

p. 166, *'I told the president'*: John Howard, joint news conference with Pervez Musharraf, Parliament House, Canberra, 15 June 2005, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 166, *'I have invited'*: Pervez Musharraf, joint news conference with John Howard, Parliament House, Canberra, 15 June 2005, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 166, *The two couples had breakfast*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.

p. 167, *still on YouTube*: John Howard bowling, www.youtube.com

p. 167, *'They seemed to me'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011; Khalid Qayum and Farhan Sharif, 'Musharraf suspends constitution, sacks chief justice' (update 1), Bloomberg, 3 November 2007.

p. 167, *'it's all pretty difficult'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.

p. 168, *'I remember thinking'*: Tim McOwan, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.

p. 168, *a series of blasts*: special reports, BBC News, 8 July 2005, www.bbc.co.uk

p. 169, *'all I would like to say'*: Tony Blair, joint news conference with John Howard, 10 Downing Street, London, 21 July 2005.

p. 169, *'Australia sympathises'*: John Howard, joint news conference with Tony Blair, 10 Downing Street, London, 21 July 2005, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 169, *'Afghanistan is'*: ibid.

p. 169, *and a second, fatal bombing*: ABC News Online, 'Indonesia investigates Bali bombing', 2 October 2005.

p. 170, *'This Provincial Reconstruction Team'*: John Howard, joint news conference with Robert Hill, Parliament House, Canberra, 13 July 2005, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 170, *'mission creep'*: Alexander Downer, 'Our messy war', *Spectator*, United Kingdom, 16 October 2010.

p. 170, *'We will help you'*: Alexander Downer, interview, Adelaide, December 2010.

p. 171, *'The reason I said'*: Richard Armitage, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.

p. 171, *'If I'd decided'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.

CHAPTER TWELVE

p. 172, *'an innocuous invitation'*: Stephen Brady, interview, Canberra, January 2011.

p. 173, *heard a rumour*: Stephen Brady, interview, Canberra, January 2011; Pieter Cobelens in an emailed response to questions, April 2011.

p. 173, *'In the Netherlands'*: Pieter Cobelens, ibid.

p. 173, *'From that moment on'*: ibid.

p. 173, *'Clear, hold, build'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.

p. 174, *'the three musketeers'*: confidential interview, 2011.

p. 174, *'You were in'*: Jan Peter Balkenende, joint news conference with John Howard, Parliament House, Canberra, 4 April 2006, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 175, *the fall of Srebrenica*: Abi Daruvalla, 'Anatomy of a massacre', *Time*, 21 April 2002.

p. *'We can say'*: Mark Mallock Brown, Chef de Cabinet, quoting Kofi Annan in a speech to 10th anniversary commemoration of Srebrenica massacre, Potocari-Srebrenica, 11 July 2005.

p. 175, *'Srebrenica dramatically influenced'*: Chat Blakeman, Charge d'Affaires, in a confidential cable from the US Embassy, the Hague, to State Department, Washington DC, 19 December 2006. WikiLeaks, 2 February 2011, www.wikileaks.org

p. 176, *Dutch defence planners*: Clifford Sobel, Ambassador, in a confidential cable from the US Embassy, the Hague, to State Department, Washington DC, 27 July 2005. WikiLeaks, 17 January 2011, www.wikileaks.org

p. 176, *'The Dutch deployment'*: Clifford Sobel, Ambassador, 'Ambassador's parting thoughts on taking the Dutch level', a secret cable from the US Embassy, the Hague, to State Department, Washington DC, 22 August 2005. WikiLeaks, 17 January 2011, www.wikileaks.org.

p. 176, *'Such preconditions include'*: Chat Blakeman, Charge d'Affairs, in a confidential cable from the US Embassy, the Hague, to State Department, Washington DC, 23 September 2005. WikiLeaks, 17 January 2011, www.wikileaks.org

p. 177, *'Australians are seen'*: Richard Armitage, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.

p. 177, *he was warmly welcomed*: confidential interviews, 2011.

p. 178, *'I think it would be fair'*: Stephen Brady, interview, Canberra, February 2011.

p. 178, *They deployed on 24 August*: John Howard, address to Australian troops, Campbell Barracks, Swanbourne, 24 August 2005, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 78, *he was shocked*: confidential interviews, 2011.

p. 178, *a dangerous place*: confidential interview, 2011.

p. 179, *'We would have very much'*: Hamid Karzai, joint news conference with John Howard, Kabul, Afghanistan, 21 November 2005, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 179, *'I do want to congratulate'*: John Howard, joint news conference with Hamid Karzai, Kabul, Afghanistan, 21 November 2005, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 180, *'They are not just there'*: ibid.

p. 180, *'Well if Australia decides'*: Hamid Karzai, ibid.

p. 180, *'Well, for Australia's part'*: John Howard, ibid.

p. 180, *'Have you been offered'*: questions to Robert Hill at a news conference, 20 January 2006, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 181, *'a petrol head'*: Alexander Downer, interview, Adelaide, December 2010.

p. 181, *1400 troops to Uruzgan*: 'More Dutch troops for Afghanistan', BBC News, 3 February 2006.
p. 181, *Australian Reconstruction Task Force*: John Howard, 'Australian contribution to a provincial reconstruction team in Afghanistan', press release, 21 February 2006.
p. 181, *'Your reputation'*: John Howard, address to Special Forces Task Group, Campbell Barracks, Swanbourne, 25 February 2006, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo
p. 182, *'very well-skilled army'*: Jan Peter Balkenende, joint news conference with John Howard, Parliament House, Canberra, 4 April 2006, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo
p. 182, *In May 2006*: John Howard and Brendan Nelson, joint news conference, Parliament House, Canberra, 8 May 2006, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo
p. 183, *'I should say to Australians'*: John Howard, ibid.
p. 183, *another 150 soldiers*: John Howard, ministerial statement, Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, Hansard, 9 August 2006, vol. 10 2006, p. 83.
p. 183, *'Afghanistan's social indicators'*: ibid.
p. 184, *'Afghanistan remains'*: ibid.
p. 184, *'We are blessed'*: Brendan Nelson, interview, Brussels, October 2010.
p. 184, *'The only bad feeling'*: Pieter Cobelens in an emailed response to questions, April 2011.
p. 184, *'catch and release program'*: confidential interviews, 2011.
p. 185, *'The Dutch have performed well'*: Roland Arnall, Ambassador, in a confidential cable from the US Embassy, The Hague, to State Department, Washington DC, 20 October 2006. WikiLeaks, 22 January 2011, www.wikileaks.org
p. 185, *'We should not underestimate'*: ibid.
p. 185, *normally even-tempered Houston*: confidential interviews, 2011.
p. 185, *'I had to get some cooks'*: Brendan Nelson, interview, Lisbon, November 2010.
p. 185, *'supplementary rations'*: Angus Houston, interview, Canberra, April 2011.
p. 186, *It cost $10 million*: ibid.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

p. 187, *in a radio interview*: John Howard, interviewed by Philip Clark, 2GB, 26 July 2000.
p. 187, *'working assumption'*: John Howard, *Lazarus Rising*, Allen & Unwin, 2010, p. 611.
p. 188, *News Ltd journalists*: Jason Koutsoukis, 'I'm not going anywhere, PM declares', *Age*, 30 April 2005.
p. 189, *the full red-carpet*: Phillip Coorey, 'Bald, ugly, one hell of a guy: Bush on Howard', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 May 2006.
p. 189, *'The Menzies tree'*: Karen Middleton, 'Howard prepares his exit', *Canberra Times*, 8 July 2006.
p. 189, *a prime-ministerial retirement*: Piers Akerman, 'The stage looks set for Howard's timely exit', *Sunday Telegraph*, 14 May 2006.
p. 189, *'in the coming weeks'*: Karen Middleton, 'Howard prepares his exit', *Canberra Times*, 8 July 2006.
p. 189, *part of his own column*: Gerard Henderson, 'Gerard Henderson's media watch', *Sydney Institute Quarterly*, issue 29, August 2006.

p. 190, *His mishandling*: AAP, 'Beazley gets wrong Rove', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 November 2006.

p. 190, *'Today our thoughts'*: Lynn Bell, 'Opposition Leader confuses Karl Rove with Rove McManus during condolence message', PM, ABC Radio, 17 November 2006.

p. 190, *'My thoughts are with him'*: Michelle Grattan, 'Rove gaffe puts heat on Beazley', *Age*, 18 November 2006.

p. 191, *Rudd announced*: Phillip Hudson and Phillip Coorey, 'Rudd, Gillard confirm challenge', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 December 2006.

p. 191, *a commission of inquiry*: Report of the Inquiry into certain Australian companies in relation to the UN Oil-for-Food Programme, established 10 November 2005, www.ag.gov.au/agdWWW/unoilForFoodInquiry.nsf

p. 192, *the possibility of charges*: Leonie Wood, 'Police abandon AWB probe', *Age*, 29 August 2009.

p. 192, *'Mercifully'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.

p. 192, *Howard privately lamented*: confidential interview, 2011.

p. 192, *'Dick, you're very welcome'*: John Howard, joint news conference with Dick Cheney, Commonwealth Parliamentary Offices, Sydney, 24 February 2007, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 192, *'America's proud'*: Dick Cheney, joint news conference with John Howard, Commonwealth Parliamentary Offices, Sydney, 24 February 2007.

p. 193, *'He has certainly'*: ibid.

p. 193, *'Howard wrote'*: Andrew Shearer, interview, Canberra. March 2011.

p. 194, *'at the head of the queue'*: Dick Cheney, joint news conference with John Howard, Commonwealth Parliamentary Offices, Sydney, 24 February 2007.

p. 194, *'on some hitchhiking tour'*: confidential interview, 2011.

p. 195, *'what gave it away'*: former SAS soldier, interview, Perth, December 2010.

p. 197, *taken a potshot*: Brendan Trembearth, 'Near miss for Australian journalists in Afghanistan', AM, ABC Radio, 14 March 2007.

p. 197, *'The projectile moved'*: ISAF operational report, Afghan War Diary, WikiLeaks, 12 March 2007, www.wikileaks.org

p. 198, *John Howard had flown*: David Crowe and Brendan Nicholson, 'Howard makes surprise Afghanistan visit', *Age*, 16 March 2007.

p. 198, *the cabin filled with smoke*: Dennis Shanahan, 'Howard stays calm as plane fills with smoke', *Australian*, 19 March 2007.

p. 199, *'We will send very shortly'*: John Howard, joint news conference with Angus Houston and Brendan Nelson, Parliament House, Canberra, 10 April 2007, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 199, *'He's obviously got a lot of friends'*: ibid.

p. 199, *'From that point on'*: Kim Beazley, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.

p. 200, *'If it's good enough'*: John Howard, joint news conference with Angus Houston and Brendan Nelson, Parliament House, Canberra, 10 April 2007.

p. 200, *'You, Mr President'*: John Howard, joint news conference with George W. Bush, Intercontinental Hotel, Sydney, 5 September 2007, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 200, *'I remember our first personal meeting'*: ibid.

p. 200, *'Australian forces will remain'*: ibid.

p. 200, *'One thing that's really important'*: George W. Bush, joint news conference with John Howard, Intercontinental Hotel, Sydney, 5 September 2007.

p. 201, *Ministers were meeting*: Paul Kelly, 'The defeat', *Australian*, 15 December 2007.

p. 201, *Kevin Rudd upstaged Howard*: John Ferguson, Gerard McManus and Ben Packham, 'Kevin Rudd's Mandarin words impress China APEC delegates', *Herald Sun*, 7 September 2007.

p. 201, *Trooper David Pearce*: Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, news conference, Defence headquarters, Canberra, 9 October 2007, www.defence.gov.au

p. 201, *'What do I tell them'*: Cosima Mariner, 'Farewell to a mate-in-arms and a father', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 October 2007.

p. 202, *the ADF lost another soldier*: Angus Houston in a tribute to Sergeant Matthew Locke, 26 October 2007.

p. 202, *'I think about it a lot'*: Brendan Nicholson and Kate Campbell, 'SAS funeral touched by proud son's tribute', *Age*, 3 November 2007.

p. 202, *'it hurts them'*: confidential interview, 2011.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

p. 203, *'It is probable'*: Robert McCallum, 'Rudd announces new Cabinet', confidential cable from the US Embassy, Canberra, to State Department, Washington DC, 29 November 2007. Obtained by WikiLeaks, published by Fairfax newspapers, December 2010.

p. 203, *'His ability to connect'*: Robert McCallum, 'Kevin Rudd is new Opposition Leader', confidential cable from the US Embassy, Canberra, to State Department, Washington DC, 4 December 2006. Obtained by WikiLeaks.org, published by Fairfax newspapers, December 2010.

p. 204, *'candid description'*: Robert McCallum, 'Ambassador's introductory call on Opposition Leader Kim Beazley', confidential cable from the US Embassy, Canberra, to State Department, Washington DC, 8 September 2006. Obtained by WikiLeaks, published by Fairfax newspapers, December 2010.

p. 204, *'I think a lot of Queenslanders'*: ABC News Online, 3 December 2007, abc.net.au

p. 204, *Private Luke Worsley*: Angus Houston, news conference, Defence headquarters, Canberra, 17 November 2007.

p. 205, *more than a thousand mourners*: Department of Defence, statement on the funeral of Private Luke Worsley, 4 December 2007.

p. 206, *'organising folk-dancing festivals'*: RFI, 'Australian PM derided French Afghan war effort', WikiLeaks, 10 December 2010.

p. 206, *'As the new boy'*: Joel Fitzgibbon, interview, Canberra, March 2011.

p. 206, *Kevin Rudd had briefed*: Robert McCallum, 'Meeting the Prime Minister', confidential cable from the US Embassy, Canberra, to State Department, Washington DC, 10 December 2007. WikiLeaks, 28 April 2011, www.wikileaks.org

p. 207, *'an existential crisis'*: Dan Clune, 'U/S Burns at 12/5 TSD SOM—Afghanistan, Pakistan, India', secret cable from the US Embassy, Canberra, to State Department, Washington DC, 3 January 2008. WikiLeaks, 16 March 2011, www.wikileaks.org

p. 207, *'The training of the army'*: ibid.

p. 207, *'stronger perhaps than'*: ibid.

p. 207, *'The previous government'*: Patrick Walters, 'We're losing war in Afghanistan, says new Minister', *Australian*, 17 December 2007.

p. 208, *'We need much more'*: ibid.

p. 208, *'I fear what the new year'*: AAP, 'Rudd fears for new year in Afghanistan', *Age*, 23 December 2007.

p. 208, *'scared the hell'*: Philip Dorling and Nick McKenzie, 'Rudd: "Scared as hell"', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 December 2010.

p. 209, *'The meeting underlined'*: Stephen Smith, joint news conference with Condoleezza Rice, State Department, Washington DC, 28 January 2008.

p. 209, *'deep and long-lasting ties'*: Condoleezza Rice, joint news conference with Stephen Smith, State Department, Washington DC, 28 January 2008, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 209, *'The basis and the nature'*: Stephen Smith, ibid.

p. 209, *the proposed appointment*: Julian Borger, 'Karzai blocks plans to give Ashdown key role in Afghanistan', *Guardian*, 28 January 2008.

p. 209, *'The United States is sorry'*: Condoleezza Rice, joint news conference with Stephen Smith, State Department, Washington DC, 28 January 2008.

p. 210, *two more Chinook*: Mike Kelly, media release, 'CH-47 detachment departs for Afghanistan', 8 February 2008.

p. 210, *'Oh no, minister'*: Joel Fitzgibbon, interview, Canberra, March 2011.

p. 210, *'I went off my head'*: ibid.

p. 211, *'still pretty aggressive'*: ibid.

p. 211, *a proper seat at NATO's ISAF table*: Ivo Daalder, 'RFG – ISAF decisionmaking involving non-NATO contributing nations', cable from US Mission NATO to State Department, 27 November 2009. WikiLeaks, 28 April 2011, www. wikileaks.org

p. 211, *'I'm frankly very surprised'*: Alexandra Kirk, 'Australia demands place at NATO table', AM, ABC Radio, 11 February 2008.

p. 212, *If the mission was creeping*: confidential interview, 2011.

p. 212, *send more soldiers*: Phillip Hudson, 'Timor's failed coup crisis', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 February 2008.

p. 212, *a national apology*: Kevin Rudd, speech to House of Representatives, Hansard, 13 February 2008, vol. 1 2008, pp. 167–173.

p. 212, *a ministerial statement*: Joel Fitzgibbon, statement to Parliament, Hansard, 19 February 2008, vol. 2 2008, p. 692.

p. 213, *'We are making'*: ibid.

p. 214, *'We had already started'*: Andrew Robb, interviewed by Barrie Cassidy, Insiders, ABC Television, 24 February 2008.

p. 214, *Rudd, Fitzgibbon and Smith*: *Sun-Herald*, 'China on agenda for Rudd team's first US talks', 24 February 2008.

p. 214, *'leaving other stuff there'*: Robert McCallum, 'Meeting the Prime Minister', confidential cable from the US Embassy, Canberra, to State Department, Washington DC, 10 December 2007. WikiLeaks, 28 April 2011, www.wikileaks.org

p. 214, *'what would be useful'*: ibid.
p. 215, *human rights for Tibet*: Kevin Rudd, 'A conversation with China's youth on the future', speech to Beijing University, 9 April 2008, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo
p. 215, *ruffle more feathers*: Jason Koutsoukis, 'Japan fury over Rudd snub', *Age*, 16 March 2008.
p. 215, *'One thing that's for sure'*: George W. Bush, joint news conference with Kevin Rudd, White House, Washington DC, 29 March 2008.
p. 216, *'Obviously, the Prime Minister'*: ibid.
p. 216, *'deeply anger'*: Robert McCallum, 'Rudd Government one year report', confidential cable from the US Embassy, Canberra, to State Department, Washington DC, 16 December 2008. Obtained by WikiLeaks, published by Fairfax newspapers 8 December 2010.
p. 217, *'Lance Corporal Jason Marks'*: Angus Houston, news conference, Defence headquarters, Canberra, 28 April 2008.
p. 217, *'The Australian nation'*: Samantha Maiden, 'More Afghanistan deaths likely: Rudd', *Australian*, 28 April 2008.
p. 217, *'In our uniform'*: Brendan Nelson, condolences, Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, Hansard, 13 May 2008, vol. 5 2008, p. 2552.
p. 217, *'All Australians need to remember'*: ibid.
p. 217, *Nelson would be ousted*: Phillip Hudson, 'Get behind Malcolm Turnbull as Liberal leader', *Age*, 16 September 2008.
p. 217, *Signaller Sean McCarthy*: Department of Defence, media release, 9 July 2008.
p. 218, *Lieutenant Michael Fussell*: Department of Defence, media release, 28 November 2008.
p. 218, *'no higher call'*: Kevin Rudd, official statement, 27 November 2008.
p. 218, *the Australian flag was lowered*: Jonathan Pearlman, 'Australia lowers flag in Iraq', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 June 2008.
p. 218, *'People should just pause'*: Stephen Smith, news conference, Perth, 2 June 2008.
p. 219, *An imaginary line*: various interviews, 2011.
p. 219, *'fight at night'*: Joel Fitzgibbon, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 219, *assurances from President Karzai*: confidential interviews, 2011.
p. 219, *allied forces contributed funds*: Keith B. Richburg, 'US makes small strides in getting Afghan army fighting fit, but hurdles remain', *Washington Post*, 1 February 2010.
p. 219, *It frustrated the trainers*: Gareth Porter, 'US headache over Afghan deserters', *Asia Times*, 26 November 2009; confidential interview, 2011.
p. 219, *The US lobbying*: Ivo Daalder, 'RFG: How to keep the Dutch in southern Afghanistan', confidential cable from US NATO Mission to State Department, Washington DC, 3 December 2009. WikiLeaks, 20 January 2011, www.wikileaks.org
p. 219, *'impressing Japan'*: Glyn Davies, 'Request to engage Japan on contributions to Afghanistan security', confidential cable from US State Department, Washington DC, to US Embassy, Tokyo, 26 June 2008. WikiLeaks, 17 June 2011, www. wikileaks.org
p. 219, *It wanted another country*: confidential interviews, 2011; Joel Fitzgibbon, interview, Canberra, March 2011; Stephen Smith, telephone interview, April 2011.
p. 219, *'My key focus'*: Joel Fitzgibbon, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 220, *'I think military processes'*: ibid.

p. 220, *Rudd was concerned*: confidential interviews, 2011.
p. 220, *Trooper Mark Donaldson*: AAP, 'Digger awarded Victoria Cross for heroic gallantry', *Age*, 16 January 2009.
p. 220, *one side of an imaginary line*: confidential interviews, 2011.
221, *'I never raised any issue'*: Joel Fitzgibbon, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 221, *began directly lobbying*: confidential interviews, 2011.
p. 221, *Operation Moshtarak*: Al Jazeera Online, 'Operation Moshtarak: at a glance', 13 February 2010, http://english.aljazeera.net
p. 221, *McChrystal wanted Afghan troops*: confidential interview, 2011.
p. 221, *'It was an issue'*: Stephen Smith, telephone interview, April 2011.
p. 222, *'Real things were said'*: confidential interview, 2011.
p. 222, *'If you stick very much'*: Ken Gillespie, interview, Canberra, April 2011.
p. 222, *'I looked at this long and hard'*: John Faulkner, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 222, *on Father's Day*: confidential interview, 2011.
p. 223, *it cost the minister his job*: Emma Rodgers, 'Fitzgibbon resigns as Defence Minister', ABC News Online, 4 June 2009.
p. 223, *'I tried very hard'*: Joel Fitzgibbon, interview, Canberra, March 2011.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

p. 224, *'If I were running'*: BBC News Online, 'Australia PM slams US candidate', 12 February 2007, www.bbc.co.uk
p. 224, *'ginned up to fight'*: Brendan Nicholson and Michael Gawenda, 'Obama row hits Howard', *Age*, 13 February 2007.
p. 225, *'Of the non-NATO countries'*: Jonathan Dart, 'Rudd congratulates Obama but rejects Afghanistan troop boost', *Age*, 7 November 2008.
p. 225, *Private Gregory Sher*: Department of Defence, official statement, 6 January 2009.
p. 225, *Holbrooke would die suddenly*: AP, 'Richard Holbrooke dead: Diplomat dies at 69', *Huffington Post*, 13 December 2010.
p. 225, *'Many people'*: Barack Obama, remarks on a new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Washington DC, 27 March 2009.
p. 226, *'I want the American people'*: ibid.
p. 226, *surge of 33,000*: Amanda Hodge, 'Obama launches Afghanistan surge', *Australian*, 19 February 2009.
p. 226, *'Afghanistan has an elected government'*: Karen de Young, 'Obama announces strategy for Afghanistan, Pakistan', *Washington Post*, 28 March 2009.
p. 227, *'a new compact'*: Jake Tapper, 'White House says era of blank check is over for Afghan President Karzai', ABC News, America, 30 November 2009.
p. 227, *'Now, for the first time'*: Bruce Riedel, joint media briefing with Richard Holbrooke and Michelle Flournoy, 27 March 2009.
p. 227, *'operational culture'*: David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 51.

p. 227, *'clear metrics'*: NPR, 'Obama's new strategy on Afghanistan, Pakistan', 27 March 2009.
p. 227, *'The world cannot afford'*: ibid.
p. 228, *'the angry kitten'*: 'America 2021: The military and the world', *Democracy: A journal of ideas*, issue 17, summer 2010.
p. 228, *'Of all the dilemmas'*: David Stout, 'Obama sounds cautious mote as he sets out Afghan plan', *New York Times*, 27 March 2009.
p. 228, *'Pakistan must demonstrate'*: Barack Obama, remarks regarding a new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Council on Foreign Relations, 27 March 2009.
p. 229, *'Does that mean'*: questions to Richard Holbrooke at a joint media briefing with Richard Holbrooke, Bruce Riedel and Michelle Flournoy, 27 March 2009.
p. 229, *'I just don't think'*: Richard Holbrooke, ibid.
p. 229, *'I think taking me out'*: John Faulkner, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 230, *'Once you're Defence Minister'*: ibid.
p. 230, *'On the whole'*: John Faulkner, National Press Club address, 24 February 2010.
p. 231, *Sergeant Brett Till*: Department of Defence, official statement, 21 March 2009.
p. 231, *Corporal Mathew Hopkins*: Department of Defence, official statement, 18 March 2009.
p. 231, *Kakarak was the scene*: Christina Lamb, 'Blunders feed opposition to foreign presence', *Age*, 8 July 2002.
p. 231, *'extraordinary lengths':* Lieutenant General Gregory Newbold with Victoria Clarke, at a briefing for journalists, US Defense Department, Washington DC, 8 July 2002.
p. 232, *'We knew they occurred'*: ibid.
p. 232, *The Afghan government said it did*: Christina Lamb, 'Blunders feed opposition to foreign presence', *Age*, 8 July 2002.
p. 232, *visiting another village*: ibid.
p. 232, *'very little doubt'*: Peter Symonds, 'Mounting anger over US atrocities in Afghanistan', World Socialist Website, 22 July 2002.
p. 232, *three separate inquiries*: Joe Kelly, 'ADF quizzes its own on Afghan civilian casualties', *Australian*, 6 July 2009.
p. 232, *'The Australian troops'*: Sophie McNeill, 'Diggers under fire', Dateline, SBS, 5 July 2009.
p. 232, *'very seriously indeed'*: Joe Kelly, 'ADF quizzes its own on Afghan civilian casualties', *Australian*, 6 July 2009.
p. 232, *Private Benjamin Ranaudo*: Department of Defence, official statement, 19 July 2009.
p. 233, *'The personal safety'*: John Faulkner, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 233, *it made 48 recommendations*: John Faulkner, media release, 1 June 2010.
p. 234, *bomb detection specialists*: Department of Defence, official statement, 8 June 2010.
p. 234, *journalist Chris Masters*: Chris Masters, 'A careful war', Four Corners, ABC Television, 5 July 2010.
p. 234, *Herbie was cremated*: *Daily Telegraph*, 'Aussie bomb dog's remains to come home', 15 June 2010.
p. 234, *a memorial service*: ABC News Online, 'Service honours bomb detection dog', 27 June 2010.
p. 234, *bomb sniffing dog*: Britt Smith, 'Bomb dog Sarbi reunited with handler', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 January 2011.

p. 235, *Whenever conditions changed*: Peter Cosgrove, interview, Sydney, January 2011.
p. 235, *At every level*: confidential interviews, 2010–2011.
p. 235, *'God moments'*: confidential interview, 2010.
p. 235, *'I think a lot of guys'*: former SAS soldier, interview, Perth, December 2010.
p. 235, *'we're all lucky'*: ibid.
p. 236, *charting public opinion*: annual surveys on Afghanistan, Lowy Institute, 2007–2011.
p. 236, *'A long protracted involvement'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.
p. 236, *widely discredited*: Craig Whitlock, 'Afghan election mess aiding Taliban propaganda', *Washington Post*, 21 September 2009.
p. 236, *'often agitated'*: Karl Eikenberry, 'Karzai dialogue on US-Afghan relations continues', secret cable from the US Embassy, Kabul, to State Department, Washington DC, 16 July 2009. WikiLeaks, 2 December 2010, www.wikileaks.org
p. 237, *'the meetings were cordial':* Karl Eikenberry in a secret cable from the US Embassy, Kabul, to State Department, Washington DC, 7 July 2009. WikiLeaks, 2 December 2010, www.wikileaks.org
p. 237, *'a paranoid and weak individual'*: ibid.
p. 237, *'it is my hope'*: ibid.
p. 238, *'misperceptions of US policy'*: ibid.
p. 238, *a drawdown of US troops*: David E. Sanger and Peter Baker, 'Afghanistan drawdown to begin in 2011, officials say', *New York Times*, 1 December 2009.
p. 238, *On Remembrance Day*: Joseph Mussomeli, 'Australians expand AUSAID, increase civilian contributions', confidential cable from the US Embassy, Kabul, to State Department, Washington DC, 3 December 2009. WikiLeaks, 20 January 2011, www.wikileaks.org
p. 239, *coached Afghan officials*: Hoyt B. Yee, 'Dutch military and diplomatic officers give the hard sell to remain in Uruzgan', 9 December 2009. WikiLeaks, 20 January 2011, www.wikileaks.org
p. 239, *'the Dutch are achieving'*: ibid.
p. 239, *'difficult, hard and bloody'*: Brad Norington, 'Troop surge vital for Afghanistan war: General Stanley McChrystal', *Australian*, 22 September 2009.
p. 239, *let fly his views*: Louis B. Susman, 'Afghanistan/Yemen/Iran: Senior UK-based diplomats discuss at Chinese Amb's farewell dinner', 14 January 2010. WikiLeaks, 4 February 2011, www.wikileaks.org
p. 240, *'waste of time'*: ibid.
p. 240,*'I unfortunately note'*: Reuters, 'Dutch Government falls over Afghan troop mission', 20 February 2010.
p. 240, *'It's a matter for NATO'*: Stephen Smith, interviewed by Jim Middleton, Asia-Pacific Focus, ABC Television, 22 February 2010.
p. 241, *25 military deaths*: http://icasualties.org/oef

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

p. 244, *'I would like Malcolm'*: Samantha Maiden, 'Tony Abbott will challenge Malcolm Turnbull on Monday', *Australian*, 27 November 2009.
p. 244, *Abbott won*: Phillip Coorey, 'Abbott wins Liberal leadership by one vote', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 December 2009.

p. 244, *He shelved plans*: Lenore Taylor, 'ETS off the agenda until late next term', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 April 2009.

p. 245, *Private Benjamin Chuck*: Department of Defence, official statement, 22 June 2010.

p. 245, *'These are hard days'*: Kevin Rudd, address to House of Representatives, Hansard, 22 June 2010, vol. 10 2010, p. 6087.

p. 245, *'All commandos take the rank'*: John Faulkner, condolence motion, Senate Hansard, 23 June 2010, vol. 7 2010, p. 4139.

p. 245, *'Did I feel it'*: John Faulkner, interview, Canberra, March 2010.

p. 245, *his chief of staff*: Peter Hartcher and Phillip Coorey, 'Rudd's secret polling on his leadership', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 June 2010.

p. 246, *'What I'm less proud of'*: Kevin Rudd, news conference, Parliament House, Canberra, 24 June 2010.

p. 247, *'a good government'*: Julia Gillard, news conference, Parliament House, Canberra, 24 June 2010.

p. 247, *'I want to say'*: ibid.

p. 247, *yet another review*: Unclassified ComISAF's initial assessment. 30 August 2009. Published by Washington Post online. 30 August 2009. http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment_Redacted_092109.pdf

p. 248, *'Bite-me'*: Michael Hastings, 'The Runaway General', *Rolling Stone*, 22 June 2010.

p. 248, *'with considerable regret'*: CNN wire staff, 'McChrystal relieved of command, Petraeus chosen to take over', CNN Online, 23 June 2010.

p. 248, *'The conduct represented'*: Barack Obama, remarks on the resignation of Stanley McChrystal, 23 June 2010, www.whitehouse.gov

p. 248, *Obama telephoned*: Helene Cooper and David E. Sanger, 'Obama says Afghan policy won't change after dismissal', *New York Times*, 23 June 2010.

p. 249, *'assumption' of the position*: readout of the President's call with Australian Prime Minister Gillard by Office of the Press Secretary, White House, 24 June 2010.

p. 249, *'extend his thanks'*: Robert Gibbs, statement by the Press Secretary on New Australian Prime Minister Gillard, White House, Washington DC, 24 June 2010.

p. 249, *a 'great honour'*: Julia Gillard, news conference, Parliament House, Canberra, 25 June 2010, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 250, *some talking behind hands*: Chris Uhlmann, ABC News 24, ABC Television, 22 July 2010; confidential interviews, 2011.

p. 250, *privately critical*: confidential interviews, 2011.

p. 250, *'given my fascination'*: Julia Gillard, remarks to US Ambassador Jeffrey Bleich, Parliament House, Canberra, 25 June 2010.

p. 251, *Private Nathan Bewes*: Department of Defence, official statement, 10 July 2010.

p. 251, *Faulkner told Gillard*: John Faulkner, interview, Canberra, March 2011.

p. 251, *'We were very unamused'*: Richard Armitage, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.

p. 251, *'puzzling, if not inept'*: James F. Cole, 'Paper score's PM's 'secret' meeting with Chinese official', confidential cable from the US Embassy, Canberra, to State Department, Washington DC, 24 March 2009. WikiLeaks, 18 April 2011, www.wikileaks.org

p. 252, *'too deferential to China'*: ibid.

p. 252, *'Although warm and engaging'*: Robert McCallum, 'Deputy PM Gillard a star in Rudd Government', confidential cable from the US Embassy, Canberra, to State Department, Washington DC, 13 June 2008. Obtained by WikiLeaks, published by Fairfax newspapers, 2011.

p. 252, *'one of the most pragmatic'*: ibid.

p. 253, *'moving forward'*: Julia Gillard, National Press Club address, 15 July 2010.

p. 253, *'Good afternoon'*: Julia Gillard, news conference, Parliament House, Canberra, 17 July 2010.

p. 253, *Trooper Jason Brown*: Department of Defence, official statement, 14 August 2010.

p. 254, *Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney*: Family of Jared MacKinney, official statement, 25 August 2010.

p. 254, *'My view would be'*: Julia Gillard, joint news conference with John Faulkner, Parliament House, Canberra, 25 August 2010.

p. 254, *'the best advice'*: ibid.

p. 255, *'Up until then'*: Julia Gillard, interview, Canberra, March 2011.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

257, *'Our focus'*: Stephen Smith, telephone interview, April 2011.

p. 257, *'We're going to be moving'*: Jeffrey Bleich, doorstop interview, US Embassy, Canberra, 5 July 2011.

p. 257, *It wasn't soon enough*: Announcement of the death of Sergeant Todd Langley. General David Hurley. Joint news conference with Stephen Smith. Defence headquarters, Canberra. 5 July 2011.

p. 258, *'We have to be very careful'*: ibid.

p. 259, *'I couldn't see the sense'*: Ric Smith, interview, Canberra, March 2011.

259, *The supporters argued*: confidential interviews, 2011.

p. 259, *But those who opposed*: confidential interviews, 2011.

p. 259, *And some doubted*: confidential interviews, 2011.

p. 260, *'Polling day recorded'*: AIHRC-UNAMA, *Joint Monitoring of Political Rights, Presidential and Provincial Council Elections*, Third Report, 1 August–21 October 2009.

p. 260, *'You can't see the body'*: confidential interview, 2010.

p. 260, *'The Army has let us down'*: Ian McPhedran and AAP, 'Digger's email to be included in investigation', *Daily Telegraph*, 21 September 2010.

p. 261, *'Such support would be'*: ABC News Online, 'Coalition wants more troops in Afghanistan', 30 September 2010.

p. 261, *'If satisfied'*: Tony Abbott, 'National security fundamentals', address to Lowy Institute, 23 April 2010.

p. 262, *'we cannot have a draw'*: Julia Gillard, address to North Melbourne grand final breakfast, 25 September 2010.

p. 262, *She deputised*: Matthew Franklin, 'Being acting PM has fringe benefits, *Australian*, 5 October 2010.

p. 262, *On 27 September*: Brigadier Lyn McDade in an official statement by Department of Defence, 27 September 2010.

p. 263, *'The accused persons'*: ibid.

p. 263, *'This is a matter'*: Julia Gillard, joint news conference with Greg Combet, Bob Brown and Christine Milne, Parliament House, Canberra, 27 September 2010.

p. 263, *'The rules of engagement'*: ibid.

p. 264, *'is it your responsibility'*: Alan Jones interviewing Tony Abbott, 2GB, 12 October 2010.

p. 264, *'I'm not sure'*: Tony Abbott, interviewed by Alan Jones, 2GB, 12 October 2010.

p. 264, *'I very strongly believe'*: Stephen Smith, interviewed by Fran Kelly, Breakfast, ABC Radio National, 1 October 2010.

p. 264, *'On 13 October'*: Alan Jones interviewing Tony Abbott, 2GB, 12 October 2010.

p. 265, *a planned operation*: confidential interview, 2011.

p. 265, *'We will strenuously defend'*: statement from two unnamed ADF soldiers, 27 September 2010, www.smh.com.au

p. 266, *On 20 May 2011*: Michael Vincent, 'Reserves pleased death charges dropped', ABC News Online, 21 May 2011.

p. 266, *'choke the words out'*: Julia Gillard, address to Australian personnel, Australian base, Tarin Kowt, Afghanistan, 2 October 2010.

p. 266, *'I did want to make sure'*: ibid.

p. 266, *'that does take guts'*: ibid.

p. 267, *'We have what we need'*: Mark Kenny, 'Julia Gillard tells troops in Afghanistan of commitment to Oruzgan mission', *Australian*, 3 October 2010.

p. 267, *she had invited*: Matthew Franklin and Peter Wilson, 'Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott at odds over trip to Afghanistan', *Australian*, 6 October 2010.

p. 267, *'I thought it was important'*: Rachael Brown, 'Abbott says jetlag kept him away from Afghanistan trip with PM', AM, ABC Radio, 5 October 2010.

p. 268, *'The last thing'*: Tony Abbott, interviewed by Ross Greenwood, 2GB, 5 October 2010.

268, *'to be really upfront'*: Julia Gillard, interviewed by Kerry O'Brien, 7.30 Report, ABC Television, 5 October 2010.

p. 268, *'I didn't particularly want'*: Tony Abbott, address to Australian personnel, Australian base, Tarin Kowt, Afghanistan, 10 October 2010.

p. 269, *'As I listened'*: ibid.

p. 269, *Channel Seven was later granted access*: AAP, 'Seven reporter denies ambushing Abbott', *Daily Telegraph*, 9 February 2011.

p. 269, *'Australia's national interests'*: Julia Gillard, address on Afghanistan, Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, Hansard, 19 October 2010, vol. 2 2010, p. 692.

p. 270, *'Some two million'*: ibid.

p. 270, *'Good government'*: ibid.

p. 270, *'After nine years'*: Tony Abbott, address on Afghanistan, Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, Hansard, 19 October 2010, vol. 2 2010, p. 700.

p. 270, *'The government that passed'*: Adam Bandt, address on Afghanistan, Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, Hansard, 20 October 2010, vol. 2 2010, p. 897.

p. 270, *'We cannot close'*: ibid.
p. 271, *Brendan Nelson did as instructed*: Brendan Nelson, interview, Brussels, October 2010.
p. 271, *'On this particular issue'*: ibid.
p. 271, *'shockingly good'*: Kim Beazley, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.
p. 272, *'a closer or better ally'*: Barack Obama, opening remarks at a meeting with Julia Gillard, Yokohama, Japan, 13 November 2010.
p. 272, *'a very honest picture'*: Julia Gillard, closing address, debate on Afghanistan, House of Representatives, Hansard, 18 November 2010, vol. 4 2010, p. 2941.
p. 272, *'unless people are engaged'*: Julia Gillard, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 273, *'our shared strategy'*: Gordon Brown, opening address to London Conference on Afghanistan, 29 January 2010.
p. 273, *withdrawal being 'conditions-based*': David Petraeus, 'Meet the Press' (US), NBC Television, 16 August 2010.
p. 274, *The country's major creditors'*: British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, statement on the London Conference on Afghanistan, 29 January 2010.
p. 274, *'civilian surge'*: 'Outcome from the London Conference', Her Majesty's Government, UK and Afghanistan, http://afghanistan.hmg.gov.uk
p. 274, *'at a diplomatic level'*: Julia Gillard, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 275, *'I remember saying once'*: William Maley, interview, Canberra, December 2011.
p. 275, *'money that is injected recklessly'*: ibid.
p. 276, *local warlord Matiullah Khan*': Jeremy Kelly, 'Long road to Tarin Kowt', *Australian*, 28 April 2009.
p. 276, *'Those six people'*: Peter Lloyd, 'Afghan militia fighters trained in Australia', Lateline, ABC Television, 29 October 2010.
p. 276, *'Nobody knows'*: Amin Saikal, telephone interview, April 2011.
p. 277, *'the most angelic character'*: Dan Oakes, 'General defends Afghan warlord ties', *Age*, 7 December 2010.
p. 277, *'That's very worrying'*: William Maley, interview, Canberra, December 2010.
p. 277 *'This conference offers'*: Hamid Karzai, statement to the London Conference, 28 January 2010.
p. 277, *'The international community'*: Ban Ki-Moon, joint news conference with Hamid Karzai at the conclusion of the Kabul Conference, 20 July 2010.
p. 278, *'to reach a level'*: Hamid Karzai, ibid.
p. 278, *'This week's NATO summit'*: Andrew Porter, 'David Cameron: end is in sight for Afghanistan', *Telegraph*, 15 November 2010.
p. 278, *mental health problems*: Jon Boone, 'US-Afghan relations sink further as Hamid Karzai accused of drug abuse', guardian.co.uk, 7 April 2010.
p. 279, *'Recruits are barely vetted'*: joint statement by 29 aid and human rights agencies, 'Protection of civilians must be at the heart of Afghanistan 'transition' strategy, warn aid agencies', 19 November 2010.
p. 279, *abusive behaviour by militias*: Nader Nadery in a joint statement by 29 aid and human rights agencies, 'Afghan Human Rights Commission', 19 November 2010.

p. 279, *prepared a report*: report by 29 international agencies, 'Nowhere To Turn the failure to protect civilians in Afghanistan'.

p. 279, *'violent, abusive'*: ibid.

p. 279, *Gillard was asked*: Julia Gillard, news conference, Lisbon, 19 November 2010, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 280, *'man-love Thursdays'*: confidential interview, 2011.

p. 280, *'My understanding is'*: Richard Armitage, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.

p. 280, *'It would be counterintuitive'*: ibid.

p. 280, *'From time to time'*: Stephen Smith, telephone interview, April 2011.

p. 281, *'I think Australia's given'*: Richard Armitage, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.

p. 281, *'on the same page'*: Julia Gillard, news conference, Lisbon, 19 November 2011.

p. 281, *The second question*: 'Questions and Answers with the NATO Secretary General, Afghan President, and the UN Secretary-General at the press conference following the meeting on afghanistan', 20 November 2010, www.nato.int

p. 281, *'a clear signal'*: Anders Fogh Rasmussen, ibid.

p. 282, *'Mr President'*: questions to Hamid Karzai, joint news conference, NATO summit, Lisbon, 20 November 2010. English translation by Yalda Hakim, April 2011.

p. 283, *It had four parts*: Kevin Rudd, address on Afghanistan, Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, Hansard, 21 October 2010, vol. 2 2010, p. 1072.

p. 283, *'We're there for a purpose'*: Julia Gillard, interview, Canberra, March 2011.

284, *'Where we are now'*: Stephen Smith, telephone interview. April 2011.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

p. 285, *'We will kill bin Laden'*: Kelli Arena, 'Obama administration to ratchet up hunt for bin Laden', CNN Politics, CNN, 12 November 2008.

p. 285, *'My preference obviously'*: Barack Obama, interviewed by Katie Couric, CBS News, 14 January 2009.

p. 286, *'I think it has been years'*: Robert Gates, interviewed with Hillary Clinton by George Stephanopoulos, ABC World News America, 6 December 2009.

p. 286, *'laying the foundation'*: Report by the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 'Tora Bora Revisited: How we failed to get bin Laden', 30 November 2009.

p. 286, *'Tonight I can report'*: Barack Obama, address to the Nation, White House, Washington DC, 1 May 2011.

p. 286, *'From Osama to Obama'*: Rachel Adams, 'From Osama to Obama, bin Laden delivers new threats', ABC World News America, 24 January 2010.

p. 287, *On the CBS 60 Minutes program*: Barack Obama, interviewed by Steve Kroft, 60 Minutes, CBS, 8 May 2011.

p. 287, *'When bombs fell'*: Barack Obama, address at Miami Dade College Commencement ceremony, Miami, 29 April 2011.

p. 288, *'You think about* Black Hawk Down*'*: Barack Obama, interviewed by Steve Kroft, 60 Minutes, CBS, 8 May 2011.

p. 288, *'You think about what happened'*: ibid.

p. 288, *The bungled Iranian hostage*: Britannica editors, '444 Days in Captivity: The Iran Hostage Crisis', Encyclopedia Britannica blog, 20 January 2011.

p. 289, *'In August of 2007'*: Jay Carney, joint press briefing with John Brennan, White House, Washington DC, 2 May 2011.

p. 290, *killed in a 'firefight'*: ibid.

p. 290, *an email she had received*: Gloria Borger quoting an email from an unnamed Senate source, CNN, 1 May 2011.

p. 290, *'the most significant achievement'*: Barack Obama, address to the nation, White House, Washington DC, 1 May 2011.

p. 291, *'Osama bin Laden declared war'*: Julia Gillard, news conference, Parliament House, Canberra, 2 May 2011.

p. 291, *'a small measure of justice'*: ibid.

p. 292, *'not the end of al Qaeda'*: ibid.

p. 292, *'We have in the White House'*: Julia Gillard, address on the death of Osama bin Laden, Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, Hansard, 10 May 2011, vol. 5 2011, p. 3416.

p. 292, *'We're still the America'*: Barack Obama, address to the Screaming Eagles 101st Airborne, Fort Campbell, Kentucky, 6 May 2011.

p. 292, *the Disney Corporation*: NBC Washington, 'Disney stakes trademark claim on SEAL Team 6', 15 May 2011.

p. 292, *'We're the nation'*: Barack Obama, address to the Screaming Eagles 101st Airborne, Fort Campbell, Kentucky, 6 May 2011.

p. 293, *'all men are created equal'*: ibid.

p. 293, *'We're the nation'*: ibid.

p. 294, *That fuelled suspicions*: Jay Solomon, Laura Meckler, Tom Wright and Zahid Hussain, 'Pakistan's bin Laden connection is probed', Wall Street Journal Online, 2 May 2011.

p. 294, *At the 2 May briefing*: John Brennan, press briefing, White House, 2 May 2011.

p. 294, *'some people inside'*: Barack Obama, interviewed by Steve Kroft, 60 Minutes, CBS, 8 May 2011.

p. 294, *'Allegations of complicity'*: AFP, 'Pakistan Prime Minister denies complicity on Osama bin Laden' *Australian,* 10 May 2011.

p. 294, *'I also take this opportunity'*: Julia Gillard, news conference, Parliament House, Canberra, 2 May 2011.

p. 294, *'It's awfully tempting'*: William Maley, interview, Canberra, December 2011.

p. 295, *'Karzai has a legitimate concern'*: ibid.

p. 295, *'a magnificent soldier'*: Angus Houston, joint news conference with Stephen Smith, Canberra, 24 May 2011.

p. 295, *'We haven't seen anything'*: ibid.

p. 295, *Exactly a week later*: Angus Houston, joint news conference with Stephen Smith, Canberra, 31 May 2011.

p. 296, *'I understand many Australians'*: Julia Gillard, news conference, Parliament House, Canberra, 31 May 2011.

p. 296, *the government made an announcement*: Julia Gillard, joint news conference with Stephen Smith, Angus Houston and service chiefs, Parliament House, Canberra, 1 June 2011, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 297, *'These sorts of events'*: David Hurley, joint news conference, Parliament House, Canberra, 1 June 2011.

p. 297, *the death of another Australian*: Angus Houston, news conference, Canberra, 7 June 2011, www.defence.gov.au

p. 297, *'When you lose somebody'*: ibid.

p. 297, *the rogue Afghan soldier*: Stephen Smith, news conference, Canberra, 20 June 2011, www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo

p. 297, *'We would have preferred'*: ibid.

p. 297, *a two-stage withdrawal*: Barack Obama, remarks, East Room, White House, 22 June 2011.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

p. 298, *'Their objective'*: Bruce Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda: Its leadership, ideology, and future*, Brookings Institution Press, 2010, p. 7.

p. 299, *made the Taliban indebted*: ibid.

p. 299, *'Where people make these distinctions*: Michael L'Estrange, interview, Canberra, January 2011.

p. 300, *'They will [withdraw]'*: Robert Hill, interview, Adelaide, January 2011.

p. 300, *'The Americans withdraw'*: Chris Barrie, interview, Canberra, April 2011.

p. 300, *'I don't think the decision'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.

p. 300, *'the signs were there'*: Peter Cosgrove, interview, Sydney, January 2011.

p. 300, *'It seemed that our time'*: Duncan Lewis, interview, Canberra, March 2011.

p. 301, *'a very black-and-white sort of scenario'*: Arthur Sinodinos, interview, Sydney, December 2011.

p. 301, *the mission had been accomplished*: John Anderson, interview, Canberra, January 2011.

p. 301, *'come to the conclusion'*: Robert Hill, interview, Adelaide, January 2011.

p. 301, *'It's not as though'*: Alexander Downer, interview, Adelaide, December 2011.

p. 302, *'When we were talking'*: Michael Thawley, interview, Los Angeles, February 2011.

p. 302, *'People are saying'*: Peter Leahy, interview, Canberra, April 2011.

p. 302, *'They were the people'*: ibid.

p. 303, *anything but democratic*: ibid.

p. 303, *Some critics linked*: John Burnett, 'Examining Halliburton's "Sweetheart' deal in Iraq"', NPR, 22 December 2003.

p. 303, *also pressing the president*: Bob Woodward, *Bush At War*, Simon & Schuster, 2002, p. 179.

p. 304, *'One of the consequences'*: Alexander Downer, interview, Adelaide, December 2010.

p. 304, *'There's a lot of people'*: former SAS soldier, confidential interview, December 2010.
p. 304, *'You could deal'*: former SAS soldier, confidential interview, December 2010.
p. 305, *'War is over for you'*: former SAS soldier, confidential interview, December 2010.
p. 305, *'If you can do that'*: former SAS soldier, confidential interview, December 2010.
p. 305, *'That was the biggest mistake'*: Maurie McNarn, interview, Canberra, May 2011.
p. 305, *a one-off payment*: James Fallows, 'Why Iraq has no army', *Atlantic Monthly*, December 2005.
p. 305, *'We don't pay armies we defeated'*: ibid.
p. 305, *'My plan was'*: Cullen Murphy and Todd S. Purdum, 'Farewell to All That: An oral history of the Bush White House', *Vanity Fair*, February 2009.
p. 306, *'There should have been'*: Tony Abbott, telephone interview, March 2011.
p. 306, *'There was no coherent plan'*: Maurie McNarn, interview, Canberra, May 2011.
p. 306, *'America fought and won'*: Ken Gillespie, interview, Canberra, April 2011.
p. 306, *'From the intelligence'*: ibid.
p. 307, *'It's pretty thin'*: Kim Beazley, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.
p. 307, *'some huge errors'*: Julia Gillard, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 307, *'I think Latham's comments'*: Joel Fitzgibbon, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 307, *'I think we did'*: Julia Gillard, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 308, *'it's very hard to run a war'*: Stephen Smith, telephone interview, April 2011.
p. 308, *'An eye was taken off'*: Julia Gillard, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 308, *'There's no doubt'*: Joel Fitzgibbon, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 308, *'I think what the so-called coalition'*: Tony Abbott, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 308, *'very serious threats'*: ibid.
p. 308, *'I really don't'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.
p. 309, *'It's the same thing'*: Ric Smith, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 309, *'A strong alliance'*: Stephen Smith, telephone interview, April 2011.
p. 309, *'I think that reflects'*: ibid.
p. 309, *'Where there's an opportunity'*: Nick Minchin, interview, Canberra, November 2011.
p. 309, *'The logic is'*: Michael Thawley, interview, Los Angeles, February 2011.
p. 310, *'The notion of the alliance'*: Richard Armitage, interview, Washington DC, February 2011.
p. 310, *'I can't imagine'*: Tony Abbott, telephone interview, March 2011.
p. 310, *'With the wisdom'*: ibid.
p. 311, *'In view of what we knew'*: John Anderson, interview, Canberra, January 2011.
p. 311, *'the Tet Offensive'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.
p. 312, *'What we may now see'*: Stephen Smith, telephone interview, April 2011.
p. 312, *'I think people'*: ibid.
p. 313, *'even at the time'*: Nick Minchin, interview, Canberra, November 2010.
p. 313, *'Our program was clear'*: Radek Sikorski, *Dust of the Saints: A Journey to Heart in Time of War*, Paragon House, 1990; Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgansty*, Profile Books, 2011, p. 5.
p. 314, *'trying to impose'*: Peter Leahy, interview, Canberra, April 2011.
p. 314, *'a very interesting answer'*: John Anderson, interview, Canberra, January 2011.
p. 314, *'I once had'*: ibid.

p. 315, *'That's why I'*: Robert Hill, interview, Adelaide, January 2011.
p. 315, *'The Afghan people'*: Julia Gillard, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 316, *'sufficient human capital'*: Angus Houston, interview, Canberra, April 2011.
p. 316, *'the perfect democracy'*: BBC News Online, 'Arnold Schwarzenegger hails 'true heroes' in UK visit', 14 October 2010.
p. 316, *'But, gee whiz'*: Peter Leahy, interview, Canberra, April 2011.
p. 316, *'Strategic denial of Afghanistan'*: Julia Gillard, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 316, *'Life's very complicated'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.
p. 317, *they have killed*: Simon Rogers and Ami Sedghi, 'Afghan civilian casualties: year by year, month by month', guardian.co.uk, 10 March 2011.
p. 317, *'We're making progress'*: David Petraeus with Robert Gates, interviewed by Diane Sawyer, ABC News America, 6 June 2011.
p. 317, *'We have not had a declared victory'*: Robert Gates, ibid.
p. 318, *'Break ties with al Qaeda'*: Hillary Clinton, speech to Asia Society, New York, 18 February 2011.
p. 318, *'accept that the Taliban'*: Alexander Downer, interview, Adelaide, December 2010.
p. 318, *'If we all just pack up'*: Alexander Downer, 'The way forward in Afghanistan', *Wall Street Journal*, 27 October 2010.
p. 318, *'I think the whole notion'*: William Maley, interview, Canberra, December 2010.
p. 319, *'it's got some logic'*: Michael L'Estrange, interview, Canberra, January 2011.
p. 319, *'It's very hard for him'*: Arthur Sinodinos, interview, Sydney, December 2010.
p. 320, *'I'm optimistic enough'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.
p. 320, *'Our people continue to do'*: Peter Cosgrove, interview, Sydney, January 2011.
p. 320, *'My view probably now'*: Michael Thawley, interview, Los Angeles, February 2011.
p. 320, *'It's a nightmare'*: John Howard, interview, Sydney, March 2011.
p. 320, *'We're strongly engaged'*: Julia Gillard, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 321, *'like a switch got turned'*: confidential interview, 2011.
p. 321, *'The Taliban would not'*: Ric Smith, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 321, *'Allegations of complicity'*: Mark Memmot, 'Pakistani Leader: "Allegations of complicity or incompetence are absurd"', NPR, 9 May 2011.
p. 321, *Pakistani journalist*: Declan Walsh, 'Missing Pakistan journalist Saleem Shahzad found dead near Islamabad', *Guardian*, 1 June 2011.
p. 322, *'If you could procure'*: William Maley, interview, Canberra, December 2010.
p. 322, *'As many, including President Bush'*: Andrew Shearer and Michael O'Hanlon, 'From losing to winning in Afghanistan', *Washington Times*, 3 October 2008.
p. 323, *'Crudely put'*: Andrew Shearer, interview, Canberra, March 2011.
p. 323, *'If we pull out immediately'*: Angus Houston, news conference, Defence headquarters, Canberra, 7 June 2010.
p. 324, *'Many people I know'*: John Anderson, interview, Canberra, January 2011.
p. 325, *'The Australian public'*: Linda Mottram, 'Afghan debate fuelled by Australian poll', Radio Australia, ABC Radio, 25 August 2010.

325, *'wobbly three-legged stool'*: Philip Dorling and Nick McKenzie, 'Rudd: "Scared as hell"', *Sydney Morning Herald*,10 December 2010.

p. 325, *'We went in'*: Ric Smith, interview, Canberra, March 2010.

Index

Abbott, Tony: on Afghanistan, 270, 310–11; on Iraq, 140, 305–6, 308; Opposition leader, 242, 243, 244, 250, 254, 261, 263–4; visits Afghanistan, 266–9
Abdul Rahman, Sheikh Omar, 128
Afghan National Army, 213
'Afghanisation' strategy, 273–84
Afghanistan: Abbott visits, 267–9; asylum seekers, 89; Australian Embassy, 182; Australian media tour, 194–8; Australian mission, 38; Bonn Agreement, 87, 314; civilian casualties, 231–2, 262–3, 264–6, 279; code of ethics, 64; concern for returned asylum seekers, 89–91; consequences of bin Laden death, 295–6; different from Iraq, 304–5; drug trade funds terrorism, 59, 63; education needed, 316; election violence, 202, 372; firearms, 64; gains, 316–18; Gillard visits, 266–7; Haqqani network, 164, 322; Hill visits, 86; hot spots, 220; Howard visits, 179–80, 194, 198; humanitarian aid to, 54–5; international security force, 87–8, 199; Karzai, 61–2, 87, 88, 89, 219, 226, 236–7, 239, 248, 260, 267, 274, 277, 281–2, 295, 314, 32; lasting change, 315–16, 317–20; law enforcement, 64; local morale poor, 239; local power struggles, 276; managed transition, 260; NATO support beyond 2014, 281–3; opium trade, 63, 227; pacification operation, 221; Pakistan security agencies assist, 321; parliamentary debate on, 262, 269–71, 272; *Pashtunwali*, 64; peace talks with Taliban, 317–18; Rudd to boost aid to, 208; Rudd visits, 147, 208, 238; Ruddock visits, 86–7; Russians in, 313–14; security handover, 226; social conditions, 183; spring the 'fighting season', 78; value of counter-insurgency effort questioned, 259–60; warlords, 80, 276, 288
Afghanistan war: air war targets Taliban, 54–5; Battle of Tora Bora, 286, 302; CIA paramilitary, 54; duration, 312; Dutch withdraw, 239, 241, 240, 257, 267; in hindsight, 310–16; mission creep, 212; Obama announces drawdown, 238; Obama increases US commitment, 224, 225–6, 248; Operation Enduring Freedom (US), 88, 185, 199; a self-fulfilling conflict, 324–5; US achievements, 317; US hunt bin Laden, 164–5; US-led Operation Enduring Freedom, 54; US withdrawal, 240, 257, 297; a war of necessity, 299
Afghanistan war, Australian deployment: altitude problems, 80, 82; Americans praise Australians, 79–80, 82–3; arrival in Afghanistan, 49, 51, 52; Australian command, 59; Australia commits to war, 28–30, 31–3, 35, 36–8, 40–3; Australian assessment to NATO, 206–8; based in Kuwait, 48–9; bipartisan commitment at home, 47; casualties, 64–5, 67; casualty risks, 46; commanders meet Karzai, 62; commitment of troops, 38, 40, 41–3, 47–8, 88, 325; contact with home, 64; cost, 68–73; disciplinary action, 66; equipment and resources, 52–3, 59–60, 66; FOB Rhino, 58–61; forces leave Australia, 58, 85; 'hammer and anvil' operation, 79–82; at Kandahar, 61, 62; local

population, 63; move into Afghanistan, 58–9; move to Bagram, 78; Operation Anaconda, 79–83; Operation Slipper, 44–6, 54, 88, 93, 159, 162; preparations, 45–8; procedural review, 66; reconnaissance and surveillance, 60–1, 63, 64; self-sufficiency, 59–60; six-monthly rotations, 88; tasks in Kuwait, 57; uniforms modified, 53; wintry conditions, 52–3; withdrawal, 38, 84–5, 88, 91, 92–3, 146–7, 183, 300, 301
Afghanistan war, Australian redeployment, 147, 301; ALP on, 199–200; Australians return, 38, 181–2; Australians' reputation, 181–2; base, 163–4, 168; Camp Russell, 65; casualties, 170, 183–4, 201–2, 204–5, 217–18, 220, 225, 231, 232–4, 236, 245, 250–1, 253, 254, 257–8, 283, 295–6, 297; civilian casualties, 262–6; Combined Team Uruzgan, 252; counter-insurgency strategy, 173–4; courts martial, 262–6; Dutch forces, 172–3, 176, 180–1, 182, 184–5, 219, 310; equipment, 178–9, 233, 260–1, 267; forces increased, 258; Howard visits, 179–80, 194, 198; International Security Assistance Force, 199, 210–11; Kamp Holland, 168, 185–6; media tour war zone, 194–8; parliamentary debate, 262, 269–71; partnership with Dutch, 41, 172–4, 176–8, 180–1, 182–6; personnel to number 1000, 199; provincial security, 198–9; public opinion, 192, 236, 239, 245, 253, 254–5, 310; reconstruction duties (PRT), 160–1, 170, 173, 176, 177–8, 180–1, 183, 192, 195, 199, 212, 252, 258–9; responsibility for detainees, 184; Special Forces involvement, 161, 162–3, 173, 178, 183; Taliban targeted, 164; US focus on covert operations, 164; US pressure to return, 159–61, 177; US seeks troop increase, 280–1; withdrawal, 158–9, 192, 284, 323
Akerman, Piers, 189
al Qaeda, 164; al-Zawahiri new leader, 291–2; assassination of Massoud, 23; Australia committed to retaliation, 35; bin Laden leadership, 23; bin Laden role, 302–3; death of bin Laden, 285–91; expansion, 302, 303; ideology, 302–3; influence underestimated, 302; other terrorist attacks, 23; responsibility for September 11, 22–3, 30, 47–8, 298–9; structure still intact, 303; and Taliban, 299, 317–18; Tora Bora caves hide-out, 78; US a target, 30–1, 48; *see also* September 11, 2001
Alston, Richard, 129
al-Zawahiri, Ayman, 286, 291–2, 302
Anderson, John, 8–9, 11–13, 19–21, 22, 24, 35, 67, 102, 130, 311, 314–15, 324, 301
Andrew, Neil, 143–4
Annan, Kofi, 119, 175
Ansett Airlines, 4, 7, 8, 34, 35
anthrax scares, 76
ANZUS Treaty, 31–3, 35, 36
APEC, 50, 51, 192, 200
Aplin, Private Timothy, 245, 251
'Arab spring', 303
Arbib, Mark, 252
Armitage, Richard, 30–1, 82, 83, 101–2, 103, 106, 118, 124, 159, 160, 171, 177, 228, 251, 280, 310
ASIO (Australian Security Intelligence Organisation): demystify activities, 98; powers increased, 97; public affairs officers, 98; seek those with overseas paramilitary training, 97; after September 11, 21, 22–3, 96–7
Assange, Julian, 253

asylum seekers to Australia: Afghan, 89–90; ‘children overboard’, 50, 85, 155; SIEV X, 50; *Tampa*, 50
Atkinson, Corporal Richard, 283
Australia: access to US intelligence, 193; anthrax scares, 76; anti-terrorism measures, 97; Bali bombings, 94–5, 99, 101, 102, 169, 217; ‘deputy-sheriff’ in Asia-Pacific, 73; emissions trading scheme debate, 243–4; overseas travel risks, 98–9; parliamentary debate on Afghanistan, 262, 268–71, 272; public view of Afghanistan war, 192, 236, 239, 310; public view of Iraq war, 192; reaction to September 11, 9–12, 19–25, 28–33; saying ‘no’ to the US, 308–9; security and immigration issues, 89; security after September 11, 43–6, 69–70; security and terrorism awareness campaign, 43–6, 75–6, 99–100; as terrorist target, 134–5, 136, 140–1; travel risk warnings, 99; *see also* asylum seekers; defence; elections
Australian casualties, 170, 183–4, 201–2, 204–5, 217–18, 220, 225, 231, 232–4, 236, 245, 250–1, 253, 254, 257–8, 283, 295–6, 297
Australian embassy, Kabul, 182
Australian Federal Police, 9, 12, 13, 95
Australian Labor Party: and Afghanistan, 20, 149, 159, 199–200; and casualties, 233–6; leadership tensions, 142, 187, 188, 190–1; opposes Iraq War, 112, 115, 139–40, 146, 151, 152, 158, 199–200, 307–8, 309; supports ANZUS, 36; and US alliance, 204; withdraws Iraq troops, 203; *see also* elections; individual politicians
Australian Secret Intelligence Service, 117
Australian Wheat Board, 191–2
Bali bombings, 94–5, 99, 101, 102, 169, 217
Balkenende, Dr Jan Pieter, 174, 181, 182, 240
Ban Ki-Moon, 277–8, 281
Bandt, Adam, 270–1
Barrie, Admiral Chris, 21, 22, 23–4, 37, 39, 44, 47, 84, 86, 300
Battle of Tora Bora, 286, 302
Beazley, Kim, 10, 29, 36, 47, 51, 83, 139, 140, 142, 144–5, 153–4, 158, 187, 188, 190–1, 200, 203, 204, 229, 271, 306–7
Berlijn, General Dick, 181, 185
Bewes, Private Nathan, 251
Bhutto, Benazir, 228
Biden, Joe, 27, 248, 260
bin Laden, Osama, 62, 164–5; and Bali bombings, 102–3; escapes capture, 79, 199, 302; escapes to Pakistan, 79, 83–4, 228, 286–7, 288; killed, 84, 286–91; local support, 64; messages from, 55, 102–3, 286; Pakistan outrage at killing, 320; role in al Qaeda, 302–3; and September 11, 23, 47–8; on US hypocrisy, 55; US targets, 48, 83–4, 228, 229, 285, 286–90
Blair, Tony, 116, 120, 123, 124, 142–3, 168, 308
Bleich, Jeffrey, 250, 257
Blix, Hans, 116, 119–20
Bolitho, Scott, 14
bomb detection dogs, 34, 233, 234

Bonn Agreement, 87, 314
Bornholt, Brigadier Gary, 84
Bosnia (Srebrenica), 174–5
Bot, Ben, 181
Brady, Stephen, 172–4, 177–8, 181
Bremer, Paul, 305
Brennan, John, 289–90, 294
Brereton, Laurie, 153, 154
Brown, Bob, 143–4
Brown, Gordon, 273, 277
Brown, Trooper Jason, 253
Bryce, Quentin, 246
Burns, William, 206–7
Bush, George HW, 40, 105
Bush, George W, 50–1, 116, 117, 123, 124, 305; in Australia, 65, 143–4; and Howard, 3, 32–3, 92, 107–9, 112, 118, 141, 149–50, 189, 200–1; and Iraq, 40, 105, 106, 109–10, 141, 303, 308; on Latham, 151; and Rudd, 215–16
Bush At War, 39, 108–9

Cameron, David, 248–9, 278, 316
Camp Russell, 65
Canada: casualties, 241; on Dutch in Afghanistan, 185, 310; support for Afghan War, 54
Cantwell, Major General John, 267, 276–7
Carney, Jay, 289, 294
Carter, Jimmy, 289
Case, Lieutenant Marcus, 295–6
casualties (Australian), 170, 183–4, 201–2, 204–5, 217–18, 220, 225, 231, 232–4, 236, 245, 250–1, 253, 254, 257–8, 283, 295–6, 297
CENTCOM, 44–5, 56, 57, 112, 226
Chamberlin, Paul, 9
Cheney, Dick, 1, 40, 42, 106, 116, 118, 192–3, 303
‘children overboard’ incident, 50, 89, 155
Chuck, Private Benjamin, 245, 250
CINCPAC, 44
citations and awards: Australian Medal of Gallantry, 81; Distinguished Service Cross, 81; Medal for Gallantry, 202, 295; US Bronze Star, 82; Victoria Cross, 220, 234, 283
Clark, Philip, 188
Clarke, Richard, 40
Clinton, Bill, 3, 39, 105
Clinton, Hillary, 27, 225, 285–6, 317–18
Cobelens, General Pieter, 172–3, 184

Cole Commission, 192
Combined Team Uruzgan, 252
Cooney, Michael, 148, 154
Cosgrove, General Peter, 37, 46, 49–50, 60, 66, 71–2, 76, 76, 84, 91, 95, 111, 112, 113, 115, 138, 162–3, 187–9, 190, 201, 300
Costello, Peter, 4, 21, 45–6, 68, 75, 76; and Howard retirement, 187–90, 201
Coughlin, Reverend Daniel, 27
Counter-Terrorism Committee, 20
court martial of ADF members, 262–6
Crean, Simon, 102, 115, 139–41, 142, 144, 145, 183, 242, 306–7
Creighton, Colonel Jim, 258, 267, 269

Dale, Private Tomas, 253
Dateline (on civilian casualties), 232
Dauth, John, 239, 240
de Hoop Scheffer, Jaap, 181
Defence, Department of: accountability, 71–2; Australia and allies, 40–1; budget, 71–3; ministers, 72, 73; speed of deployment, 39
Defence Intelligence Organisation, 112
Defence, Intelligence and Security Branch, 20
Defence Science and Technology Organisation, 60–1
Defence White Paper, 73, 222–3
Dodson, Louise, 1–2
Donaldson, Trooper Mark, 220, 234
Downer, Alexander: Foreign Minister, 10–11, 18, 24–5, 42–3, 69, 99, 113–14, 138, 201, 304; on invoking ANZUS, 31–3; on Iraq, 121–2, 159, 308, 313; meets Rice, 117, 160; on mission creep, 170, 313; Opposition leader, 242; on Taliban, 301, 318; talks with Dutch, 181
Dutch Defence Force, 238–9; allied views on, 184–5, 310; casualties, 241; government involvement, 174–5, 176–8, 181, 183; ‘oil spot strategy’, 173–4; partnership with Australians, 41, 172–4, 176–8, 180–1, 182–6; support for Afghan war, 310; withdraw from Afghanistan, 176, 239, 240, 241, 257, 267

East Timor, 36, 48, 66, 84, 212, 258
Edwards, George, 8, 13
Eikenberry, Karl, 236–8
ElBaradei, Mohamed, 116
elections (Australia): 2001, 10, 48, 50, 51, 68–71, 75–6, 89; 2004, 155–6, 157; 2007, 134, 201, 203; 2010, 242, 249–50, 253–4, 256
emissions trading scheme, 243–4

Fahey, John, 70, 71

Farmer, Bill, 86
Farr, Malcolm, 188
Faulkner, John, 222, 229–31, 232, 233, 245, 246, 249, 250, 251, 254–5, 256–7, 324
Fitzgibbon, Joel, 203, 205–6, 207–8, 210–11, 212–13, 214, 216, 217, 219–21, 222–3, 229, 231, 232–3, 307
Fletcher, Dale, 216
Flood, Philip, 90
Flood inquiry, 97
Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of, 41, 90, 160
Fox, Lieutenant Colonel David, 62
France: casualties in Afghanistan, 241
Franks, General Tommy, 112
Frydenberg, Josh, 10–11
Fussell, Lieutenant Michael, 218

Garner, General Jay, 305
Garrett, Peter, 154
Gartrell, Tim, 153–4
Gates, Robert, 206, 211, 214, 219, 225, 247, 248, 285–6, 317
Germany, 79; casualties in Afghanistan, 241
Ghazni, 63
Gibbs, Robert, 249
Gilani, Yousuf Raza, 294, 321
Gillard, Julia, 133, 191, 230, 250–1, 263, 278, 286, 324; on Afghanistan, 247, 254–5, 261–2, 283, 307, 312–13, 315–16, 317; on Australia's foreign policy, 268–9, 271–2; challenges for ALP leadership, 204, 242–3, 244–6, 249, 253; on death of bin Laden, 291–2; on international diplomacy, 268; on Iraq war, 307–8; and Obama, 249, 250, 272; and parliamentary debate on Afghanistan, 269–71; on relations with Pakistan, 320–2; US perception of, 252; visits Afghanistan, 266–7
Gillespie, Major General Ken, 45–6, 48, 54, 56, 57, 58, 82, 84, 111, 222, 306
Gilmore, Major General Peter 'Gus', 58–9, 60, 62, 81, 82
'God moments', 235–6
Graham, Lindsay, 130
Griffin, Alan, 147
Group of 20, 252
Guantanamo Bay, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131–2, 134, 143, 184, 193–4
Gusmao, Xanana, 212

Habib, Ahmed, 143, 144
Habib, Mamdouh, 127, 128–34, 143
Hagee, Commandant Michael W, 59

Hailston, Lieutenant General Earl, 58
Hakim, Yalda, 282
‘hammer and anvil’ operation, 79–82
Haqqani network, 164, 322
Hastert, Dennis, 27
Hawke, Allan, 44
Hawke, Bob, 29, 82–3, 242
Heb-e-Islami militia network, 322
Hekmatyar, Gulbuddin, 322
Henderson, Gerard, 189–90
Hendy, Peter, 11–12, 47
Hicks, David, 127–31, 134, 143, 150, 184–5, 193–4
Hill, Robert, 22, 35, 72, 83, 84–6, 88, 89, 91, 92–3, 105, 112–13, 115–16, 138, 160, 161, 162, 170, 178, 180, 300, 301, 315, 322
HMAS *ANZAC*, 47
HMAS *Kanimbla*, 115–16
Holbrooke, Richard, 225, 228, 229
Hollingworth, Peter, 42, 152–3
Hopkins, Corporal Mathew, 231
Houston, Air Chief Marshal Angus, 48–9, 114–15, 163–4, 178, 184, 185–6, 220, 230–1, 249, 276, 295, 296, 316, 323
Howard, Janette, 9, 13, 27, 166, 187, 202
Howard, John, 38, 70, 86, 87, 89, 95, 99–100, 102, 145, 146, 159, 193, 242; addresses US Congress, 92; and Afghanistan, 47–8, 67, 161, 165, 169, 171, 173, 181–2, 183, 192, 300, 181–2, 183, 192, 320, 326; on Australian casualties, 202; invokes ANZUS Treaty, 31–3; on Bali bombings, 95–6; in Bali after bombing, 102; battlefields pilgrimage, 73–4, 188; and Bush, 3, 32–3, 92, 107–9, 112, 118, 141, 149–50, 189, 200–1; and defence spending, 73–4; election defeat, 201, 203, 204; on Hicks and Habib, 129, 130, 133–4, 193–4; Iraq commitment, 38, 47, 101, 104, 106–7, 116, 117–19, 121, 122–5, 126, 127, 150, 155, 200, 308; on Karzai, 87; and London bombings, 168–9; and military intervention, 113; and Musharraf, 165–6, 167; national security awareness campaign, 99–100; and Obama, 224; on Pakistan, 320; on September 11, 1–8, 12, 13–14, 16–18, 23, 25, 27, 30, 76; retirement issue, 187–90, 200; visits Afghanistan, 179–80, 194, 198; visits Iraq, 198; visits Pakistan, 166–7, 179–80
Howard, Lyall and Walter, 73–4
Howard, Melanie, 9
Howard, Richard, 9
Howard, Tim, 13, 14
Howes, Paul, 252
Hu Jintao, 143, 144
Human Rights Watch, 91
Hurley, Lieutenant General David, 296–7

Hussein, Saddam, 39, 103, 105, 116, 119, 124, 304, 308

Incident Response Regiment, 43–4, 95
Indonesia, 37; Bali bombings, 94–5, 99, 101, 169; bomb outside Australian embassy, 155; condemns US retaliation in Afghanistan, 50–1; Garuda air crash, 215; Jemaah Islamiyah, 94–5, 121; reaction to September 11, 50–1; travel to post-Bali, 98, 99
intelligence and security agencies: accountability, 90; and Afghan asylum seekers, 89–90; and Bali bombings, 95–6, 100–2; Australian Secret Intelligence Service, 117; budgets, 74; Defence Intelligence Organisation, 112; under Gillard, 250; implications of September 11, 43–4; inquiry into, 90; intelligence coup on WMD, 117; under Rudd, 250; *see also* ASIO
International Security Assistance Force (Afghanistan), 85, 87–8, 160, 172, 199, 205, 210–11, 213, 239
Iran: hostage rescue (1979), 288–9; 'Tanker War' (Iran and Iraq), 82–3
Iraq war: 'cakewalk' predicted, 159; coalition of the willing, 308; different from Afghanistan, 304–5; doubts about, 142–3; in hindsight, 303–8; initial combat phase, 141; lack of planning, 305–6; mission creep, 313; Operation Catalyst, 162; Operation Desert Fox, 39; US air strikes, 124, 125; US assembles coalition, 40; US invasion, 105–6, 111–12, 303; US links with September 11, 105; US rationale for, 105–6, 108–10, 304; weapons of mass destruction, 103, 105, 106–7, 112, 117, 142–3, 152, 306–7
Iraq war, Australian forces, 39, 304–8; ADF shopping list, 113; air bases, 115; Al Muthanna Task Group, 161; Australia and US relations, 125, 307, 309–10; Bush on withdrawal of, 151; casualties, 170, 192; commitment, 124, 200; decision to go, 104, 106, 107, 110, 114, 115, 116, 117–24, 126; distance factor, 114; forces farewelled, 115; harm minimisation, 125; HMAS *Kanimbla*, 115–16; Howard visits, 198–9; opposition to, 112, 115, 123, 139–40; overwatch role, 192; preparations, 104, 111–12, 113–15, 116; public view of, 121, 192; redeployment of forces to Afghanistan, 161; Rudd promises withdrawal, 208; Rudd visits, 208; tasks and timeline, 116; troops withdrawn from Afghanistan for, 158–9; US supports Australian withdrawal, 216; withdrawal, 203, 213, 218

Jawbreaker operation, 54
Jeffery, Michael, 152–3
Jemaah Islamiyah, 94–5, 96, 97, 121, 302
Jessop, Mark, 7
Johnson, Liz, 5
Johnston, David, 260–1
Jones, Alan, 263–5
Jones, Kim, 107
Jones, Lance Corporal Andrew, 257, 296–7
Jones, Tony, 149
Jordan, Alister, 245

Kamp, Henk, 181
Kandahar, 61, 63–4
Karzai, President Hamid; Afghan leader, 61–2, 87–8, 89, 219, 226–7, 239, 248, 274, 314, 322; capability questioned, 209, 237–8; Gillard talks with, 267, 281; and Howard, 179–80, 199; and NATO, 281–3; and Northern Alliance, 61; on Pakistan, 295; Rudd meets, 208; and transition strategy, 259–60, 277–9; US losing faith in, 236–8
Keating, Paul, 203, 242
Keelty, Mick, 74, 95, 135–6, 137–8
Kehl, Jeff, 197
Kelly, Mike, 210
Kelly, Paul, 70
Kerry, John, 286
Khan, Matiullah, 276–7
Kidston, Jamie, 197, 198
Kilcullen, David, 227
Kirby, Private Grant, 253
Knight, Deborah, 3
Kovco, Private Jacob, 170
Kuwait, 49

Langhorne, Peter, 9
Langley, Sergeant Todd, 257–8
Larcombe, Sapper Jamie, 283
Laskar-e-Toiba, 302
Latham, Mark, 144–6, 147–9, 151, 152, 153–8, 191, 242, 307
Latham Diaries, 148, 152
Leahy, Major General Peter, 84, 164–5, 302–3, 314, 316
L'Estrange, Michael, 160, 206–7, 299, 319
Lewis, Brigadier Duncan, 44, 58, 59, 62, 81–2, 300, 323
Lewis, Steve, 150–1, 188
Libby, Lewis 'Scooter', 117
Liberal-National Coalition: and emissions trading scheme, 244; *see also* Howard, John; individual politicians
Lisbon summit, 279–83
Locke, Sergeant Matthew, 202
Lodin, Zia, 80
Logan, Sandi, 15
London bombings, 120, 168–9
London conference, 239, 240, 273, 277, 278–9
Ludlam, Scott, 271
Lute, Lieutenant General Douglas, 226

McCain, John, 130
McCallum, Robert, 203, 206, 214, 252
McCarthy, Signaller Sean, 217–18
McChrystal, General Stanley, 164, 221, 222, 226, 247, 248–9
McDade, Brigadier Lyn, 262–3
McKew, Maxine, 101–2, 103, 201
McKiernan, General David, 247
MacKinney, Lance Corporal Jared, 254, 260, 269
McLachlan, Ian, 72
McMahon, Lieutenant Colonel James, 163–4
McNarn, Major General Maurie, 111–12, 114–15, 116, 125, 305, 306
McOwan, Major General Tim, 163, 168
Maiden, Samantha, 156
Maley, Professor William, 274–7, 294–5, 318, 322
Margulies, Joseph, 131–3
Marks, Lance Corporal Jason, 217
Marr, David, 243
Masserini, Mary, 15–16
Massoud, Ahmad Shah, 23, 299
Masters, Chris, 234
Mastrian, Michael, 28
Mattis, Brigadier General Jim, 59, 62
media: air travel, 214–15; tour of Afghanistan, 194–8
Menzies, Sir Robert, 40–1
Middleton, Jim, 7
Milne, Glenn, 6, 7
Minchin, Nick, 71, 73, 77, 101, 309, 313
mission creep, 170, 212, 313
Mladic, Ratko, 175
Moerland, Sapper Jacob, 234
Molan, Major General Jim, 261
Moore, John, 72
Moore-Wilton, Max, 4, 34
Mori, Major Michael, 134, 194
Mubarak, Hosni, 303
Mullen, Mike, 222, 226, 248
Musharraf, Pervez, 31, 165–6, 167, 289
Mussomeli, Joseph, 238

Nadery, Nader, 279
National Security Committee, 21, 22, 23, 66, 71, 74, 96, 135, 161, 178, 212, 250, 256

NATO, 32; Australian assessment of Afghanistan, 206–8; and Karzai, 281–3
Negroponte, John, 214
Nelson, Brendan, 72, 180, 184, 185, 204, 205, 217, 218, 229, 242, 271
Nettle, Kerry, 143, 144
Newbold, Lieutenant General, 231–2
Nikolic, Andrew, 45–6, 48, 58, 64, 65
Noble, Roger, 45
Northern Alliance (United Front), 23, 54, 56, 61–2, 127, 299
Nutt, Tony, 19

O'Brien, Kerry, 268
O'Hanlon, Michael, 322
O'Leary, Tony, 3, 4, 7, 19
Oakes, Laurie, 19, 20, 148
Oakeshott, Rob, 254
Obama, Barack, 261, 280; Afghanistan strategy, 224, 225–9, 238, 240, 247–8, 278; announces Afghanistan drawdown, 238; elected, 224, 225; and Gillard, 249, 250, 271–2; hunts bin Laden, 229, 285, 286–93; and Karzai, 248; and McChrystal, 247–8; Pakistan strategy, 228–9
Office of National Assessments, 89, 90, 107, 112
Omar, Mullah Mohammed, 62, 83–4
Operation Anaconda, 79–83
Operation Catalyst, 162
Operation Enduring Freedom, 54, 88, 185, 199
Operation Slipper, 44–6, 54, 88, 93, 159, 162
Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams, 213
Organ, Michael, 143, 144

Pakistan: and Afghan insurgents, 159, 321; anger at bin Laden killing, 293–4, 320, 321; Australian relations with, 166, 294, 320–1; and border insurgencies, 159, 207; earthquake, 166; harbours bin Laden, 164–5, 286–7, 288, 289, 294; Howard visits, 166–7; international focus on, 320–1; Musharraf, 165–6, 167; nuclear capability, 294, 320; Obama hunts bin Laden, 228–9; after September 11, 30–1; and Taliban, 31; US forces embedded with, 164
Palmer, Warrant Officer Clint, 81
Palmer, Private Scott, 245, 251
Panetta, Leon, 286
Parker, General Nick, 249
Pashtunwali, 64
Patterson, Anne, 164
Patterson, Torkel, 32
Pearce, Trooper David, 201
Petraeus, General David, 208, 226, 248, 249, 267, 317

Pezzullo, Mike, 10
Philip, Bernard, 116, 258
Powell, Colin, 1, 106, 117, 118, 121–2
Project for the New American Century, 105–6

Qatar, 49
Quetta Shura, 322
Quinn, Martin, 238–9
Qutb, Sayyid, 302

Ramos-Horta, Jose, 212
Ranaudo, Private Benjamin, 232–3
Rasmussen, Anders Fogh, 281
Ray, Robert, 230
Reagan, Ronald, 289
Rein, Therese, 202, 243, 246
Reith, Peter, 11–12, 22, 39, 41–2, 46, 47, 51, 69, 72
Rice, Condoleezza, 39, 92, 116–17, 160, 209, 252, 305
Richardson, Dennis, 21, 22–3, 95–6, 136, 137–8, 189
Riedel, Bruce, 226, 298
Riley, Mark, 269
Robb, Andrew, 213–14
Roberts-Smith, Corporal Ben, 283
Robinson, Sapper Rowan, 297, 323
Rocket Propelled Grenade, 196–8
Roh Moo-Hyun, 121
Rudd, Kevin, 145, 159, 306–7; on Afghanistan, 146–7; and Bush, 215–16; on casualties, 204, 205, 217, 218; elected PM, 201, 203–4; ends Iraq commitment, 218; foreign affairs minister, 203, 251, 256; Gillard challenges, 204, 242–3, 244–6; and Karzai, 238, 240–1; and Latham, 146–9; and Obama, 224, 225; Opposition leader, 191, 201; overseas trip as prime minister, 214–15; Prime Minister, 203, 206, 212, 225; and US alliance, 204; US perception of, 251–2; visits Afghanistan, 147, 208, 238; visits Iraq, 208; and withdrawal from Afghanistan, 213, 218–19; and withdrawal from Iraq, 203, 213–14, 218
Ruddock, Philip, 22, 86–7, 89, 104, 129, 130–1
Rumsfeld, Donald, 1, 2, 40, 42, 51–2, 79, 105, 106, 111, 118, 303, 305
Rumsfeld's Rules, 51
Russell, Sergeant Andrew, 65
Russell, Kylie, 65
Russians in Afghanistan, 313–14
Rwanda, 275–6

Saikal, Professor Amin, 276
Saikal, Mahmoud, 146–7
Salvadori, Corporal Tristan, 64–5
Schieffer, Tom, 14, 33, 47–8, 137, 145
Schultz, George, 82–3
security agencies *see* intelligence and security agencies
Sedwill, Mark, 274
September 11, 2001, 291; Afghan war to avenge, 298; aftermath, 37, 69, 96–7, 304; al Qaeda responsible for, 12, 22–3, 30, 47–8, 298–9; al Qaeda's objectives, 23, 298–9; American reaction, 17, 25–7, 37; Australian reaction, 9–12, 16, 19–25, 28–33; Australians in New York, 5, 6, 8, 11, 42–3; Howard commits Australia to war, 28–30, 31; Howard in Washington, 1–4, 26–7; implications for Australia, 12, 43–4; news reports, 4–5; Pakistan's and US retaliation, 30–1; Pentagon hit, 7–8, 13, 14–15; intelligence failure and response, 303–4; retaliation, 28–9, 30, 31, 32, 44; World Trade Centre hit, 4–6, 7, 9, 26
Shahzad, Syed Saleem, 321
Sharazi, Gul Agha, 62
Shearer, Andrew, 160, 193, 322–3
Sher, Private Gregory, 225
SIEV (Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel) X, 50
Sinodinos, Arthur, 19, 21, 71, 76, 87, 136, 301, 319–20
Slocombe, Walter, 305
Smith, Sapper Darren, 234
Smith, Mike, 18
Smith, Ric, 95, 163, 258–9, 308–9, 321
Smith, Stephen, 203, 208–10, 214, 218, 221, 240–1, 251, 256–7, 258, 262, 264, 280–1, 283, 284, 308, 309, 311–12
Solomon Islands, 36–7, 212, 258
Spain (Madrid) bombings, 134–5, 136
Special Air Service Regiment, 43
Special Forces Command, 161, 162
Special Operations Command, 44
Special Operations Task Force, 262–3
Stephanopoulos, George, 285–6
sticker shock, 69
Stokes, Kerry, 95
Straw, Jack, 120
Sukarnoputri, Megawati, 50–1, 121
Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel (SIEV) X, 50
Swan, Wayne, 262

Tactical Assault Group, 43, 44

Taliban, 159, 164; active in South-East Asia, 101–2; and Afghan people, 173, 174; and al Qaeda, 299, 301, 317–18; and Pakistan, 31; anti-drug stance, 63; forced from government, 87, 301; negotiating with, 317–19; target of US air war, 54–5; US support for Northern Alliance, 56; using torture, 62
Tampa (asylum seekers), 7, 8, 9, 20, 50
Tenet, George, 107, 305
terrorism: Australia's awareness campaign, 99–100; Australia a target, 134–5, 136–8, 140; Bali bombings, 94–5, 169; intelligence on, 100–1; London transport bombings, 168–9; Madrid bombings, 134–5; *see also* September 11, 2001
Thawley, Michael, 2, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31–2, 23, 41, 48, 49, 106, 111, 124–5, 302, 309, 320
Till, Sergeant Brett, 231
Titheridge, Air Vice Marshal Al, 111
Tora Bora, Battle of, 78, 79
Truss, Warren, 123
Turnbull, Greg, 10
Turnbull, Malcolm, 217, 242, 244
Tysoe, Ross, 95

United Kingdom: in Afghanistan, 38, 54, 78, 79, 120, 241, 278, 316; Blair, 116, 120, 123, 124, 142–3, 168, 308; Brown, 273, 277; Cameron, 248–9, 278, 316; casualties, 241; critical of Obama's timetable, 240; intelligence on Iraq, 112–13; ISAF peacekeeping force, 85; London bombings, 120, 168–9; peacekeeping, 85; special relationship with US, 56
United Nations Security Council, 43
United States: anthrax attacks, 56–7, 76; Howard's support after September 11, 17–18, 27; Iranian hostage rescue, 288–9; legality of military commissions, 130; Obama elected, 224, 225; and Pakistan, 228–9, 294–5; perception of Gillard, 252; personal freedom issues on airlines, 74–5; Project for the New American Century, 105–6; retaliation after September 11, 30; and Rudd, 204, 208–9, 251–2; seen as dragging in allies, 39; special relationship with Britain, 56; World Trade Center bombing, 23, 128; *see also*, September 11
United States in Afghanistan: achievements, 317; air support for Northern Alliance, 56; bin Laden killed in covert operation, 84, 289–91; bin Laden primary target, 229; casualties, 241; CIA paramilitary operatives (Jawbreaker team), 54; greater focus on Iraq, 200–1; humanitarian aid, 54–5; job there finished, 91, 92–3; and Karzai, 236–8, 278–9; leading in Uruzgan, 257; Obama announces drawdown, 238; Operation Anaconda, 79–82; pacification operation, 221; praise for Australians, 79–80, 82–3; reliance on aerial bombardment, 79; staged withdrawal, 257–8, 297; troops increased, 247–8
United States, Australian alliance: Australian access to intelligence, 193; Australia commits to Afghanistan, 28–30, 31–3, 35, 36–8, 40, 41–2; Australia's 'red line', 221–2; Australia saying 'no' to, 308–9; benefits, 310; Cheney on, 192–3; importance to US, 310; praise for Australians, 79–80, 82–3, 238–9; Smith confirms alliance, 209

United States in Iraq: and Australia's entry into war, 106–7, 110, 111–12, 114, 120–2; and Australian withdrawal, 214, 216; Bush on initial phase, 141; Bush ultimatum, 122–3, 124; focus on, 200–1; intelligence on weapons, 116–17; invasion, 105, 303; opposition to, 106; planning, 104, 105–10, 111; review recommends more troops, 247–8
USS *Canberra*, 32

Victoria Cross, 220, 234, 283
Vietnam War, 40–1, 79, 140, 307, 311–12

Wallace, Signalman Martin 'Jock', 81
warlords, 80, 276, 288
Washer, Mal, 260
weapons of mass destruction, 103, 105, 106–7, 112, 117, 142–3, 152, 306–7
Weber, Greg, 5
Wenham, Andrew Ibrahim, 97
White Derek, 45
White, Professor Hugh, 324–5
Wikileaks, 128, 164, 197, 237, 251, 253, 303–4
Wilkie, Andrew, 89–90, 91, 117, 260
Williams, Daryl, 98, 99, 129
Wilson, Joe, 117
Winter, Major Scott, 177
Wolfowitz, Paul, 106, 111, 232, 303, 305
Wood, Sergeant Brett, 295
Woodward, Bob, 39, 108–9
World Trade Center: bombing (1993), 23, 128; struck (September 11), 4–6, 7, 9, 26
Worsley, Private Luke, 204–5

Zaher, Mohammed, 87
Zoellick, Bob, 106, 118

MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY PRESS
An imprint of Melbourne University Publishing Limited
187 Grattan Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia
mup-info@unimelb.edu.au
www.mup.com.au

First published 2011
Text © Karen Middleton, 2011
Design and typography © Melbourne University Publishing Limited, 2011

This book is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968* and subsequent amendments, no part may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted by any means or process whatsoever without the prior written permission of the publishers.

Every attempt has been made to locate the copyright holders for material quoted in this book. Any person or organisation that may have been overlooked or misattributed may contact the publisher.
Cover design by Marianna Berek-Lewis
Typeset by TypeSkill
Printed by Griffin Press, South Australia

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Middleton, Karen Margaret.

An unwinnable war: Australia in Afghanistan / Karen Middleton.

9780522857665 (pbk)
9780522860498 (ebook: epub)

Includes index.

Afghan War, 2001—Participation, Australian.
Afghan War, 2001—Political aspects.

958.1047394

This file was downloaded from Z-Library project

Your gateway to knowledge and culture. Accessible for everyone.

z-library.sk z-lib.gs z-lib.fm go-to-library.sk

Official Telegram channel

Z-Access

https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Z-Library